RE KING

Sept 1903.

[illegible] NOVELS

MOONTIDE PRIMA
By Gilbert Parker

CAPTAIN MACKLIN
By Richard Harding Davis

THE SHEEP-STEALERS
By Violet Jacob

THE MYSTERY OF THE SEA
By Bram Stoker

MOTHER EARTH
By Frances Harrod

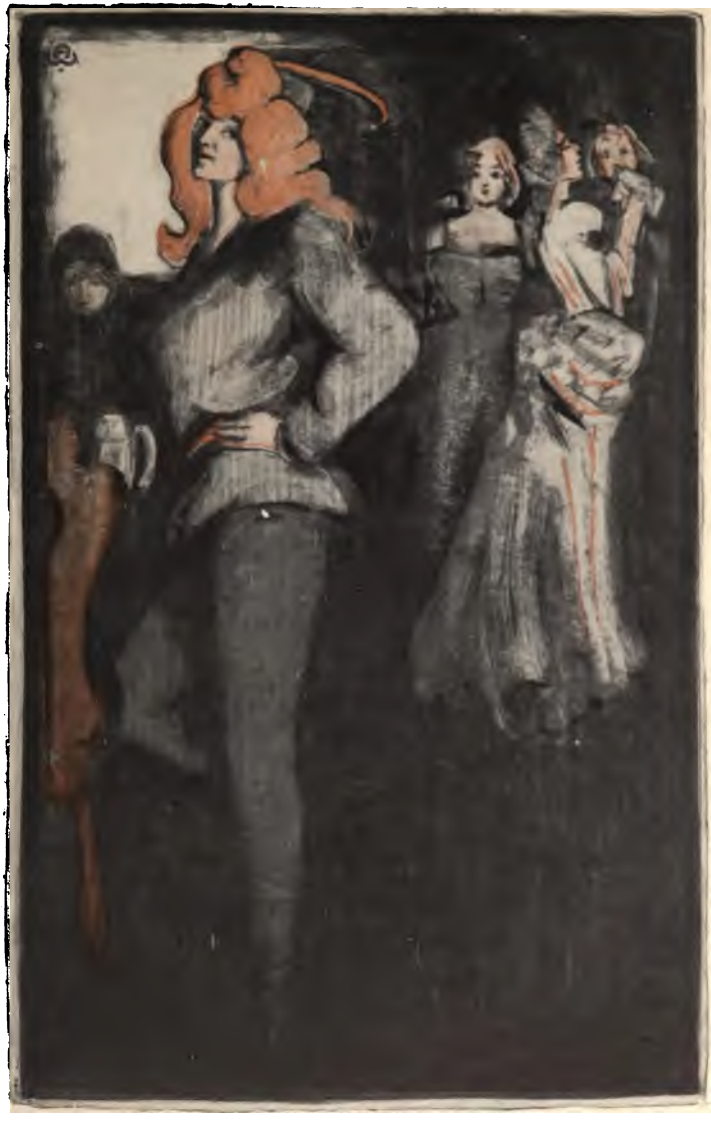
THE WINDS OF THE WORLD
By Millicent Sutherland

THE STORY OF EDEN
By Dolf Wyllarde

THE ASSASSINS
By N. M. Meakin

BY BREAD ALONE
By I. K. Friedman

London: WILLIAM HEINEMANN
21 Bedford Street, W.C.



"Yonder she-thing in the man's habit is Huguette du Hamel, a wild wench whom men call the Abbess." (Page 25.)

[illegible] in the man's habit is Huguette du Hamel, a [illegible] been call the Abbess.[2] (Page 25.)

[illegible]

by

Justin Huntly McCarthy

[illegible]

London
William Heinemann
[illegible]

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

If I were king—ah love, if I were king!
What tributary nations would I bring
To stoop before your sceptre and to swear
Allegiance to your lips and eyes and hair.
Beneath your feet what treasures I would fling:—
The stars should be your pearls upon a string,
The world a ruby for your finger ring,
And you should have the sun and moon to wear
If I were king.

Let these wild dreams and wilder words take wing,
Deep in the woods I hear a shepherd sing
A simple ballad to a sylvan air,
Of love that ever finds your face more fair.
I could not give you any godlier thing
If I were king.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE FIRCONE TAVERN

[illegible] dark main room of the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] air seemed to have lost all its [illegible] [illegible] a degraded angel. It was [illegible] [illegible], as with the loss of vitality; it [illegible] [illegible] with the smells of [illegible] and [illegible] [illegible] and heavy as if with the [illegible] [illegible] and all the vagabonds that [illegible] [illegible] from its evil dawn. Such [illegible] [illegible] glimmering flames as lit the place—for [illegible] a mild fire on the wide hearth in spite of [illegible] weather—peopled the gloom with [illegible] [illegible] shadows as of lean fingers that [illegible] [illegible] to fleh, or clenched themselves to [illegible] back. But its patrons seemed to like [illegible] well enough in spite of its [illegible], and [illegible] [illegible], the fat landlord, drowsy with his [illegible] [illegible] dripping from the [illegible], surveyed [illegible] [illegible], and wallowed as it were in the [illegible]

and clink of mug and can, the full-throated laughter and the shrill chatter, crisply emphasized by oaths, which assured him of the Fircone's popularity with its intimates. Master Robin's intelligence was limited; his wit was simple; the processes of his mind moved easily along the lines of least resistance. The Burgundians might be hammering with mailed fists at the walls of Paris; the fire-new crown of Louis the Eleventh might be falling from the royal forehead: it mattered not a jot to dishonest Robin so long as the Fircone brimmed with company.

There was enough company in the room on this evening to content even his wish. It was not the kind of company that a wise man would desire to keep, but it delighted the innkeeper, for it drank deeply and spent freely, and in Robin's view it was of no more concern to him how the money that changed hands was come by than it was how the profound potations might affect the brains and stomachs of his clients. If any officer of the law had questioned him as to his association with a certain mysterious Brotherhood of the Cockleshells whose plunderings and pilferings were the pride of the Court of Miracles and the fear of citizens with strong boxes, he would have shrugged his fat shoulders and shaken his round head and disowned all knowledge

[illegible] the hearthstone, with men in withered [illegible] wine-stained to the very bones.

[illegible] were five in number, and four of them were [illegible] round a table in the coolest corner of the [illegible] the corner that was sheltered from the heat of [illegible] by the high-backed settle, the corner that [illegible] the main door if one desired—as one often [illegible] ran out in a hurry, and to the red-curtained [illegible] if one desired—as one seldom did—of [illegible] of fresh air. Robin Turgis knew them all, [illegible] them all, feared them all, and yet he hated [illegible] them because his Beaune wine was [illegible], and because he could keep his own counsel; [illegible] René de Montigny, in a jerkin of rubbed faded purple velvet, with his malign, Italianate [illegible] and his delicate Italianate grace; rotund Guy [illegible], blind, old and bald; Casin Cholet, tall and [illegible], with the figure of a stork and the features [illegible] bird of prey; Jehan le Loup, who looked as [illegible] as his nickname; these Robin Turgis eyed [illegible] fatigued with a kind of pride. It was a [illegible] privilege for the Pieceno to boast such patrons. [illegible] settle, with his face to the fire, Gollet [illegible]

[illegible] sprawled in a drunken sleep, forgetting and forgotten, a harmless looking, good-natured looking knave who was neither harmless nor good-natured.

For every man of the gang there was a woman, and there was a woman over, who was easily the central star of the flaunting galaxy. The shabby bravery of the men was matched by the shabby bravery of five out of the six women. Gaudy, painted, assertive strumpets with young, fair, shameless faces—worthy Jills of the ill-favoured Jacks who cuddled them—Jehanneton, the fair helm-maker; Denise, Blanche, Isabeau, and Guillemette, the landlord's daughter, who consorted gaily enough with these brightly-plumaged birds of a rogue's paradise. But the sixth woman was a bird of quite another feather.

Over all the clatter this woman's voice rose suddenly as clear as the call of a thrush, and the hot space seemed to cool and the hot air to clean as she sang. She who sang was a girl of five and twenty, whom it had pleased to clothe her ripe womanhood in a boy's habit, that clasped her fine body as close as a second skin, and she might have passed for a man no otherwhere than in a madhouse. She looked very charming in the stained and faded daintiness of her male attire. She wore a green velvet doublet

[illegible] sat on the edge of a table [illegible] leg loose and strained upon the [illegible] she turned her face as if it had been a [illegible] prostrated as if there were no other work for [illegible] to do than to sing. The men and women [illegible] wild around the table kept quiet, [illegible] her and staring at her, sleepy. Only [illegible] Robin Turgis was alert to hear, for he knew it was worth while to listen when [illegible] chose to sing. Robin Turgis knew all about [illegible]. Her gentle blood was wild blood, and in [illegible] her birth and her name she had drifted up [illegible] of strange pleasure to be the idol of the [illegible] shrine. Her voice was sweet and the tune [illegible] a tender, appealing grace, with a little [illegible] in it that brought tears into the singer's eyes. [illegible] mouthed the words as if she found them [illegible] as honey. And this is what she sang:

[illegible] of pleasure, one and all,
[illegible] of fragrant feature delicate,
[illegible] bodies slim, and hearts small,
[illegible]

"Your eyes are bright, your grace is great
To hold your lovers' hearts in thrall;
Use your red lips before too late,
Love ere love flies beyond recall."

Her voice dropped and her fingers tinkled over the strings. René de Montigny turned his dark, well-featured face in a sweeping leer that seemed to taste the familiar graces with gusto. "Devilish good advice, Dollies," he shouted, and as he spoke he hugged the nearest girl close to him, and tilting up her chin with his free hand, kissed her noisily. The girl squealed a little at his roughness; the other pairs laughed and clasped after his example, only the singer, unheeding, lifted her sweet voice again, and this time there was a savour of gall in the sweetness of the honey:

"For soon the golden hair is grey,
And all the body's lovely line
In wrinkled meanness slipped astray;
The limbs so round and ripe and fine
Shrivelled and withered; quenched the shine
That made your eyes as bright as day:
So, ladies, hear these words of mine,
Love, ere love flutter far away."

[illegible]

[illegible] there was a little silence while [illegible] flitted away into the blackness [illegible] broken by one of the girls.

"Eané, that was a sad song, Abbess," [illegible] sighed, and her face seemed to have paled [illegible] fine colours and the lines about her mouth and eyes to have grown older in surrender to [illegible] thoughts. She whom the girl called Abbess laughed, and her mirth sounded harshly after the dreamy sweetness of her song.

"Master François Villon made it for me [illegible] she answered. "'You will grow old, Bess,' he said, 'and I make you this song to teach you [illegible] things.'"

[illegible] Tabarie, whose red hair bundled out like [illegible] flames from the fiery sun of his countenance, [illegible] his hands to the girl's waist and threw [illegible] near to him. "Kiss me and forget it," he [illegible] said. The girl gave importunacy a little push [illegible] sent him staggering back to his seat. "I have [illegible] for any Jack of you all but François," she [illegible] while the others roared at the man's discomfiture. "Ah, there is no one of you that can [illegible] him, or make one and do his [illegible] the [illegible] glorious."

The girl whom purple-coated René had kissed suddenly shivered a little. "A strange reason for liking a man," she whispered, "that he make you sad." She glanced wistfully round at her companions: to the faces of the women the influence of the song had lent an unwonted softness, but had brought no touch of tenderness to those of the men. Jehan le Loup banged his fist heavily on the table in furious protestation till the cans and flagons rattled.

"Is this a Court of Love?" he grunted, baring his yellow tusks in a swinish rage. "There are other rooms for love-making," and he jerked his thumb towards the roof. "We are here for drinking; we are here for dicing; to the devil with smocks and sonnets."

He jumbled the ivories lustily as he growled and the familiar jingle banished unfamiliar fancies. He slapped the spotted cubes on the table and as they rolled into equilibrium eager eyes counted them, and fingers eager or reluctant pinched or pushed at coins. The spell of the music was broken. The melodious Abbess, with eyes now glittering and tearless, swung her supple body from table to bench, thrust herself a place among the players, shouted to Robin Turgis to bring more wine, and spreading some silver on the dingy board surrendered to speculation. Nobody

[illegible] gently through the [illegible] and [illegible] [illegible]ly around him. The [illegible] [illegible]ped fellow, somewhere near the [illegible] [illegible] age. He was dressed in the [illegible] [illegible] his burgoon, and he wore the long fold [illegible] his cloth cap very decisively to [illegible] [illegible] peered into the obscurity of the [illegible] [illegible]ing smile that deepened in its [illegible] [illegible] as its owner surveyed the noisy [illegible] [illegible] [illegible], and nodded his head as he [illegible] [illegible] the members. Confident that nobody [illegible] he stealthily entered the room, and holding [illegible] [illegible], he motioned to one who still stood [illegible] [illegible] entry. The summons was answered by [illegible] [illegible] of another figure, capped and hooded [illegible] who slipped in swiftly and furtively, and [illegible] [illegible] for the furthest and loneliest [illegible] [illegible] without looking to right or left, while his [illegible] [illegible] closing the door as noiselessly as possible followed quickly in his footsteps. If Master [illegible] dancing attendance upon his clamorous [illegible] could have divined the identity of the new-

comers whose advent he regarded so indifferently, his purple face would have paled and his stomach failed him at the thought that the Fircone sheltered the baleful presence of the king and of his malign satellite, Tristan l'Hermite.

The two strangers seated themselves at a small table in the very pole of the room to the place where the Abbess and her friends were busy, and the second of the pair, drawing a little apart the dark-coloured fold of cloth that almost concealed his features, looked around him curiously.

"Is this the eyrie?" he whispered, and his companion answered him in the same low tone, "This is the Fircone Tavern, sire." The other's finger was lifted to his lip at once in warning. "Hush, gossip, hush," he muttered. "No title now, I beg of you. Here I am not Louis of France, but a simple sober citizen like yourself. I suppose we must take something for the good of the house?" His henchman promptly replied that such action was indispensable. But Louis still looked doubtful. "Will the liquor be very detestable," he asked, inserting two thin fingers in the black pouch at his belt. Tristan shook his head. "Nay, you can get good wine here if you know how to ask for it—and how to pay for it."

"No one knows better than I how to ask for

[illegible] "Tristan smoothed. "The king [illegible] "Then, why do you keep my service?" he [illegible]pped. Tristan shrugged his shoulders. "Some [illegible]ings of devotion, I suppose. Here stands Master [illegible]nkeeper." For by this time Robin Turgis was at their elbow, scanning them narrowly with his [illegible] pig-like eyes that could make little, however, of the well-curbed faces. He waited on their order with a kind of ferocious submission, draining his rank forehead with a sweep of his dirty palm.

"[illegible] Friend," said Louis, sniffing sardonically at the [illegible] disorderly personality of the taverner, "you [illegible] here two decent cits who have turned a penny [illegible] in a bargain, and have a mind to wet their [illegible] in consequence. Have you aught to offer [illegible] good alike for purse and palate?"

[illegible] Turgis nodded his round head and fondled [illegible] round stomach. "We have a white wine of [illegible]," he said unctuously, as if he were tasting [illegible] he commended, "at two sols the flagon [illegible] noble drinking."

[illegible] king's sense of economy shivered at the sum [illegible] had been a wound.

[illegible] Dieu!" he stammered. "So it should [illegible]." Robin Turgis [illegible]

Tristan clinched the business. "Bring it," he said decisively, and as the landlord shambled away towards his cellar, Tristan met the king's condemnatory frown squarely.

"I wear out my hands and feet in your service," he said, "I want to save my throat and stomach."

Louis made no answer and was mournfully silent until the obese landlord returned with the much-vaunted vintage, which he set down on the table with a brace of goblets. Louis fumbled with reluctant fingers in his pouch, extracted the exact amount necessary for payment and dropped it into the fat paw of Robin Turgis. But Robin lingered and Louis looking at him in surprise met the admonishing glare of Tristan. "Give him a penny for himself," Tristan whispered, and the king, with an unwillingness he was at no pains to conceal, added the demanded drink-money to the other coins, and eyed the departing back of the landlord with well-defined aversion. "You are generous with other people's pennies, friend," he snapped at his companion, but Tristan, paying no heed to his querulousness, filled the two cups with the clear golden liquid and thrust one of them under the nose of the sulky monarch. Its fine dry fragrance soothed Louis; he took a deep sip and was mollified; another and he had forgiven

[illegible] humbly over the rim of the goblet [illegible] "My friend Tristan," he [illegible] drily, stretching his thin legs in delicious [illegible] Tristan was in no holiday humour.

"Let's hope it mayn't be seeing death, [illegible] lordship," he snorted. "There are a couple of rogues in that survey who would spit you or split you [illegible] for the price of a drink."

[illegible] laughed affably. "And no such cheap [illegible]," he commented, "seeing what wine costs [illegible]. But this is an interesting business."

Tristan would concede nothing to the king's good [illegible]. "Where's the interest?" he asked. "[illegible], lords and bonarchas boosing together, [illegible] keep the same company at court—only a [illegible] cleaner—and not be out of pocket for the [illegible] either."

The king's mouth puckered in appreciation of [illegible] memory. He leaned forward and touched Tristan [illegible].

"Dennis Tristan, there is at my court a scholar [illegible] told me an Eastern tale."

"Pray God it be a gay one such as your majesty [illegible]."

"[illegible], man; no 'Majesty' here. [illegible]

Eastern King, one Haroun, surnamed, as I shall be surnamed, The Just."

Tristan grunted sceptically, but Louis, ignoring the ejaculation, went on.

"It was his pastime to go about Bagdad of nights in disguise, and mingling with his people learn much to the advantage of the realm. I am following his example, and I expect to learn much in my turn."

Tristan looked pityingly at the complacent king. "You are likely to learn how unpopular you are, which I could have told you without this trouble; and you will be lucky if you do not get your throat cut into the bargain."

Something almost like a smile disturbed the familiar composure of the king's wrinkles. He took another sip of the wine and his affability expanded. "You are always a bird of evil omen," he chirped. "Be bright, man; look at me. The Burgundian Leaguer is at my gates; my throne sways like a rocking-chair, yet I don't pull a sad face."

"It's a good thing that somebody is pleased," Tristan commented. "Yes," said Louis, opening out his thin hands and studying their palms attentively, "I am pleased——" Tristan interrupted him roughly. "Pleased that the Burgundians threaten you outside the walls of Paris; pleased that Thibaut

[illegible] Tristan, [illegible] you, inside the walls of Paris, pleased that your soldiers are mutinous; pleased that your citizens are sullen; by my faith, here are four royal reasons for a royal pleasure."

Louis shook his head playfully at his servant's grumbling. "Gossip Tristan," he asked, "do you know why I have come to this hovel to-night? I do not walk abroad like a king-errant in mere idleness of mind. I have come to learn what company my lord the Grand Constable keeps." Tristan's shaggy eyebrows arched in surprise as the king continued: "Our good Olivier assures us that our dear Thibaut d'Aussigny has taken it into his head of late to walk the streets by night and to haunt strange taverns such as this same Fircone. I am plagued with a woman's curiosity, Tristan, and I thought I would peep over Messire Thibaut's shoulder and have an eye on his cards."

Tristan chuckled. "The Grand Constable bears you a grudge since you chose to turn a kind eye on the girl of Vaucelles."

"She was a wise virgin to dislike Thibaut," mused [illegible]. "Was she a foolish virgin to mistrust [illegible]?" questioned Tristan. Louis shrugged [illegible]. "She is a proud piece, gossip. When [illegible] she flamed into a

red rage that chastened me. But if she's not for me she's not for Thibaut either." "The Grand Constable is a bad enemy," Tristan commented. The king replied at random.

"Tristan, I had a strange dream last night. I dreamed that I was a swine rooting in the streets of Paris, and that I found a pearl of great price in the kennel. I picked it up and set it in my crown—"

"A crowned pig," Tristan interrupted. "'Tis like a tavern sign." Louis did not seem to resent the interruption.

"My good gossip, in a dream nothing seems strange. Well, as I said, I set this pearl in my crown and the light of it seemed to fill all my good city of Paris with glory so that I could see every street and alley, every tower and pinnacle, more clearly than in a summer's noon. And then methought that the pearl weighed so heavy upon my forehead that I plucked it from its place and cast it to the ground, and would have trodden it under foot when a star shot swiftly from Heaven and stayed me."

The king looked eagerly at his companion, who seemed wholly uninterested in the narrative of the royal vision. "Dreams and stars, stars and dreams," he sneered. "Leave dreams to weaklings, sire." Louis frowned. "Don't sneer, gossip, but

[illegible]

[illegible] from the rest of its body, to the [illegible] [illegible]. His companion shrugged his shoulders. "Some of the worst cats and rats in all Paris," he muttered. "The men belong to a fellowship that is called the Company of the Cockleshells, and have [illegible] cant of their own that baffles the thieves' [illegible] of your majesty——" but here a warning kick from [illegible] made him wince and change his words—"if you wished to savour rascality there are your [illegible]. The women are trulls. Yonder she-thing in the [illegible]'s habit is Huguette du Hamel, a wild woman, whom men call the Abbess for her nunnery of light [illegible]. There be four of her minions with her now, [illegible] la belle Heaulmière as they name her, [illegible] the slipper-maker, Blanche and Isabeau. [illegible] are detestable dames!"

[illegible]

[illegible]ry and larceny. The ferret-faced knave who is tickling the girl's knee is Jehan le Loup. Bullies and bawds, pandars and parasites: to enumerate their offenses would be to say the Decalogue backward."

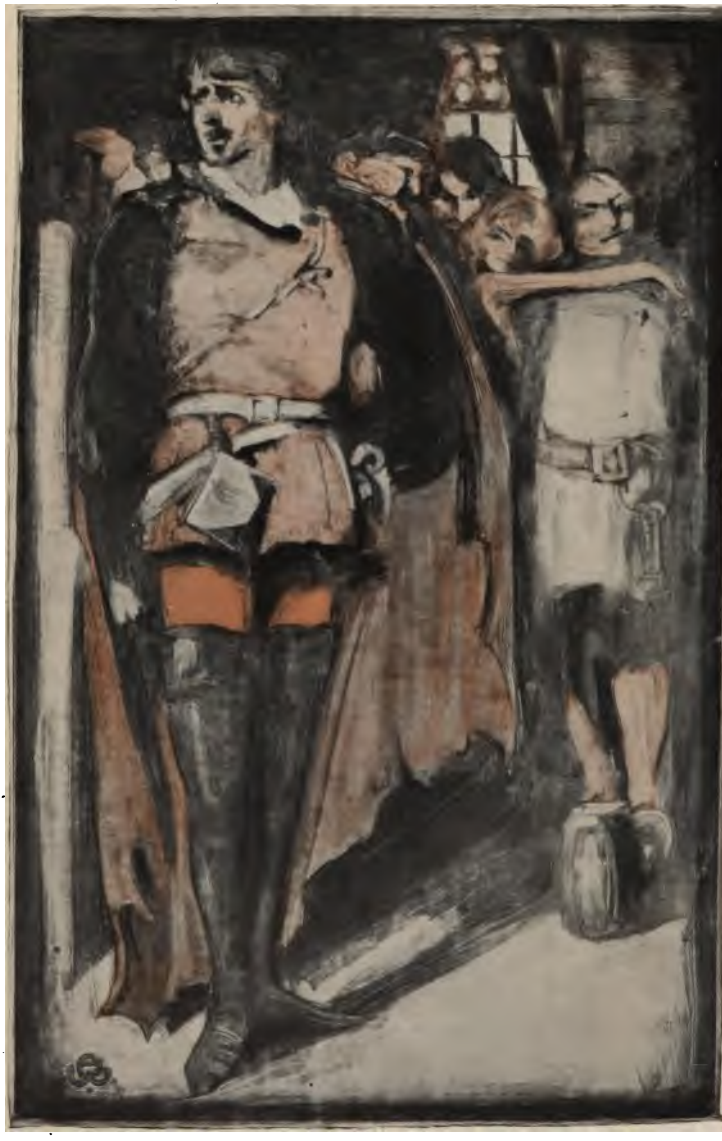
"You have a pithy humour, gossip," and Louis grinned. "Our gallows shall be busy anon."

Tristan was about to open his mouth in approval of a sentiment so pleasing to his ears when his words and his purpose were alike arrested by a sound of a voice singing outside the tavern door.

The voice was a man's voice, something rough and strained for fine music, and yet with a kind of full and florid sweetness that carried the words clearly through the red-curtained windows. They seemed to make a complaint of Fortune:

"Since I have left the prison gate
Where I came near to say good-bye
To this poor life that needs must fly
From the malignity of Fate,
Perchance she now will pass me by
Since I have left the prison gate."

If the king pricked his ear to listen, and even Tristan moved a little in his lethargy, the effect of the



"One François Villon, scholar, poet, drinker, drabber, blabber, *good* at pen, point, and pitcher."

"It is the voice of François!" "It is [illegible] a unutterable pipe," agreed René de [illegible] pocketing his winnings into his pouch. Robin [illegible] raised his hands in a comical despair as he mutter[illegible] "Here is the devil out of hell again." All the men and women were looking eagerly at the door.

"Who is this?" asked Louis of Tristan, "whose coming seems so to flutter these night-birds?"

"The strangest knave in all Paris," Tristan answered. "One François Villon, scholar, poet, drinker, sworder, drabber, blabber, good at pot-hook, and pitcher. In the Court of Miracles they call him the King of the Cockleshells. Judge him for yourself."

CHAPTER II

MASTER FRANÇOIS VILLON

As Tristan spoke the tavern latch rattled, the tavern door was flung noisily open, and the king's gaze rested on a strange figure framed in the entry. The man was of middle height, spare and slight and lean; his thin, eager face was bronzed with the suns and winds of a generation, and lined with the stern ciphers of malign experiences. His dark, straight hair was long and unkempt; the finer lines of his cheeks and chin were blurred with the uncropped growth of a week-old beard; his eyes were bright and quick; his glance restless and comprehensive. A cunning reader of features would have found a home for high thoughts behind the fine forehead, the lines of infinite tenderness upon the mobile lips, the light of some noble conflagration in the wild eyes. He was dressed in faded finery of many colours, so ragged and patched and hostile that he had very much the air of a gaudy scarecrow. His ruined cloak was tilted by a long sword; his disordered thatch was crowned by a battered cap grotesquely adorned with a cock's feather. In his leathern belt a small vellum bound book of verses kept company with a dagger.

[illegible] the threshold in a fantastic attitude of [illegible] slammed the door behind him and strode [illegible] to greet his friends.

"Well, Hearts of Gold, how are ye?" he [illegible] loudly as he advanced with head thrown back and [illegible] hands extended. "Did ye miss me, lads; did ye [illegible] me, lasses?"

[illegible] Huguette was at his side in an instant, [illegible] her arms about his neck fondling him and [illegible] upon him. "Surely I missed you," she whispered. "Where have you been, little monkey?"

[illegible] François looked at her for a moment with [illegible] pity. Then gently extricating himself from [illegible] embrace he called out, "Give me a wash of wine, [illegible] my throat's parched with piping."

[illegible] man thrust his own mug towards Master [illegible], beseeching him to drink of it, but he waved [illegible] all aside imperially. "Nay, I will [illegible] he said. "Have we no landlord here? Master [illegible] come hither."

[illegible] Tuigle, who had kept apart up to now, [illegible]

moved slowly forward with his thumbs in his girdle and a sour smile on his fat cheeks. Master François addressed him sternly, twitching as he did so the landlord's greasy cap from his pate and sending it flying down the room. "Why do you not salute gentry when they honour your pot-house? A mug of your best Beaune, Master Beggar-maker, to drink damnation to the Burgundians."

Robin Turgis made no motion to obey, but his small eyes seemed to grow smaller as they stared. "What colour has money now-a-days, Master François?" he asked doggedly. In a moment the brown, dirty hand of the poet was clapped to his dagger and there was something of a wolfish snarl in his voice as he answered menacingly, "The colour of blood sometimes." But the landlord, unabashed and undismayed, stood his ground.

"None of your swaggering, Master François," he said sturdily. "There is such a thing as a king in France and that king's name is writ fair on his coinage. Show me a Louis XI. and I will show you my Beaune wine."

The face of Master François flushed under its grime, and he fiddled at his dagger nervously, as one uncertain whether to laugh or cry at the dilemma which confronted him. Huguette and Montigny

[illegible] the poet's score when he [illegible] Tristan the king forestalled their [illegible] his feet with creditable alacrity he [illegible] towards Master François and saluted him [illegible] gracious wave of the hand. "Will you let me [illegible] small service to you," he began politely, [illegible] Villon turned to stare at him in surprised [illegible] "Will you honour me by drinking that [illegible] wine our host brags of at my expense?"

[illegible]'s astonishment had not unnerved his clutch [illegible]portunity. Here was a god out of a machine, [illegible] cool liquor to dry gullets. Master [illegible] gave back the salutation with a mien of [illegible] condescension, while the rest of the company [illegible] at the burgess who thus thrust himself [illegible] them, and Tristan, cursing the king for his [illegible], felt for a hidden dagger.

[illegible]'s patronising wave of the hand was magnificent in its effrontery, and his words matched his [illegible] nobly.

[illegible] are a civil stranger, and I will so far honour [illegible] Louis bowed. "I left my purse under my pillow [illegible] morning"—a roar of laughter saluted the [illegible]—"and this ungentle fellow denies [illegible]. How rarely we meet with an ale-draper [illegible] a gentleman."

With an unmoved countenance Louis listened to Villon's words. "Yet the sale of a thing so noble ought to beget a kind of nobility in the vendor," he said with great gravity; then turning to Robin Turgis, whose mouth was gaping at this colloquy, he bade him bring a flagon of his best, and as he did so he tendered him a silver coin for which Robin extended his fat fingers—and extended them too late. For at the sight of the silver the eyes of Master François had glistened, and his lean, brown hand, swift and agile as a hawk, had swooped between the king and the publican, and had secured the coin, which he promptly held up and surveyed in an apparent ecstasy of admiration.

"Is this the good king's counter?" he asked, and as he did so he plucked off his shabby bonnet and paid the exalted coin a profound obeisance. "Well, God bless his majesty, say I, for I owe him my present liberty. There was a gaol-clearing when he came to Paris, and as I happened to be in gaol at the time—through an error of the law"—here he paused to leer knowingly at his comrades, who yelled commendation—"they were good enough to kick me into the free air. Will you add to your kindness, old gentleman"—and here Master François spun round and solemnly saluted his unknown entertainer—"by

[illegible] in memory of this notable event?" [illegible] fortitude could not prevent him from [illegible] thing of a wry face as he hastily answered, [illegible] means." He beckoned discreetly to Robin [illegible] who, making a wide circle round Master [illegible] stole to the king's side, received from him [illegible] coin and hastened away to bring the drink [illegible] for.

From his corner Tristan surveyed the episode with [illegible] enjoyment. "Master Villon, Master Villon," [illegible] murmured to himself, "you'll be sorry for this, [illegible] sorry indeed." And in his mind's eye he trans[illegible] the fantastic figure, posturing and grimacing [illegible] to the end of a long rope hanging from [illegible] gallows. Master François, ignorant of the [illegible] irony of existence, wafted a kiss airily [illegible] tips of his fingers to his patron. "You are [illegible] right, old gentleman," he said approvingly, [illegible] turned slightly. "You have an [illegible] [illegible] "Yet you are [illegible]

and Huguette enquired with every emphasis of impoliteness: "What's his age to you, sobersides?" But Villon quietly waved his turbulent companions into tranquility. "Patience, damsels," he said blandly. "Patience, good comrades of the Cockleshell. If our friend is inquisitive at least he has paid his fee," and as he spoke he hid his face for a moment behind the huge mug of Beaune wine which Robin Turgis at that moment handed to him. Much refreshed by his mighty draught he resumed briskly: "For three and thirty years I have taken toll of life with such result as you see. A light pocket is a plague, but a light heart and a light love make amends for much." And as he spoke he slapped his pocket whose emptiness gave back no jingle, drummed lightly on his bosom and nodded gallantly to the admiring womenkind. "You are a philosopher," said the king. "You are a little angel," cried the Abbess, flinging her arms round the poet in an enthusiastic hug. The girl's homage seemed little to Villon's taste, for he disengaged himself swiftly from the embrace, saying as he did so: "Gently, Abbess, gently! My shoulders tingle and my sides ache too sorely for claspings."

Villon's manner was so decisive and his meaning so obvious that the curiosity of the gang burned

[illegible] a certain [illegible] love, [illegible]
[illegible] that it really [illegible]
[illegible] lady moved Hugelotte to [illegible]
[illegible] to Villon, challenging the [illegible] [illegible]
[illegible] Villon gently cooled her impatience
[illegible] "There are many kinds of
[illegible] all
[illegible] know well enough. I am a
[illegible] no less, and so sometimes I
[illegible] such Athanasian wenches, but
[illegible] Jenkinneton."

[illegible] of her novices' names the Abbess
[illegible] girl fiercely. "You minxes," she
[illegible] make eyes at my man?" The pair
[illegible] her fury, but Master Villon, who
[illegible] to have fallen into a meditative
[illegible] a kind of reverie, as

[illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible] in
[illegible]
[illegible] are
[illegible] Louis
[illegible]
[illegible] lage—"

for my toys, and singers of songs sometimes love in another fashion. And so it has chanced to me for my sins and to my sorrow."

Villon's chin had dropped upon his breast; the cock's feather drooped dismally; the singer seemed quite chapfallen. Huguette, tired of glaring at her offending minions, again turned her scornful attention to her dejected lover. "Cry-baby!" she sneered scornfully, pointing with derisive finger at Master François, in whose eyes indeed the close observer could discern the threatening of tears. Jehanneton came sidling round to Villon, piqued by natural curiosity, and the desire to vex Huguette. "Tell us your love-tale, François," she pleaded, and her pleading found an immediate supporter in Louis. The Arabian nature of his adventure enchanted him, and he had a child's taste for a story. "May I support the lady's prayer," he said, "unless a stranger's presence distresses you?"

Villon turned to him with a mocking laugh. "Lord love you, no," he answered. "I have long since forgotten reticence and will discourse of my empty purse, my empty belly, and my empty heart to any man. Gather around me, cullions and cutpurses, and listen to the strange adventure of Master François Villon, clerk of Paris."

Joyous applause greeted his speech. Jehan le Loup,

[illegible] upon an empty barrel, [illegible] it forward, and standing it on [illegible] invited Villon to take his seat upon this whimsical throne. The poet sprang lightly upon the perch thus provided for him, and sat there with his legs crossed, holding his long sword against his knees with both hands. The men and women gathered about him, like bees about a rose-bush. Huguette placed herself on a stool at his feet. Jehanneton flung herself full length on the ground and stared up into his face. Robin Turgis straddled a bench at some distance and grinned. Louis seized the opportunity to whisper behind his hand to Tristan that he found the fellow diverting, to which Tristan replied gruffly that he for his part found him a dull ape. Louis might have argued the point but his interest was [illegible] by the voice of Villon, who, being comfortably installed on his wine-cask, was beginning his promised narrative. A philosopher would have [illegible] something pathetic in the picture of the [illegible] rascal thus girdled about with blackguards. [illegible] sort, his lean body quivering, his eager [illegible] mockery on his lips and [illegible]

Blowens, that three days ago, when I was lying in the kennel, which is my humour, and staring at the sky, which is my recreation—I speak, honest citizen, but in parable or allegory, a dear device with the schoolmen—I saw between me and Heaven the face of a lady, the loveliest face I ever saw."

Here the poor Abbess, indignation overcrowding her borrowed mannishness, began to sniffle and to assert that the speaker was a faithless pig, but Villon, unheeding her whimpers, went on with his tale.

"She was going to church—God shield her—but she looked my way as she passed, and though she saw me no more than she saw the cobble-stone I stood on, I saw her once and for ever. We song-chandlers babble a deal of love, but for the most part we know little or nothing about it, and when it comes it knocks us silly. I was knocked so silly that—well, what do you think was the silly thing I did?"

Villon turned his alert face to each member of his audience, and his derisive mouth belied the sadness of his eyes.

"Emptied a can for oblivion," Montigny suggested. Blanche was no less practical.

"Kissed a wench for the same purpose," she cried. "The times that I've been wooed out of my name!"

[illegible] pinched her," and added the [illegible] with finger and thumb on Blanche's [illegible]

[illegible] François dissipated all this roguish [illegible] with a contemptuous gesture.

[illegible] la, la," he chirruped. "Sillier than all those [illegible] her into the church."

[illegible] of astonishment fell upon the audience. [illegible] de Cayeulx had sufficient presence of [illegible] dissimulate his amazement in a prolonged [illegible] Louis crossed himself repeatedly under his [illegible] "You are not a church-goer, sir?" he quoth [illegible]. Villon answered him sweetly.

[illegible] old Queernabs, unless there's an alms-box [illegible] or a matter of gold plate to pilfer." Guy [illegible] hurriedly interrupted him with a warning [illegible] Gave!" and a significant glance at the stran[illegible] Villon derided his fears.

[illegible]," he cried, leaning forward and play[illegible] Louis on the back with his sword. [illegible] Guffin has a friendly face and can take a [illegible] you, old rabbit?"

[illegible] and then grinned as Tristan gasped

in anger. "I thank Heaven I have a sense of humour," he said, with a sly glance at his companion. Villon went on with his story.

"Well, I sprawled there in the dark, with my knees on the cold ground, and all the while the sound of her beauty was sweet in my ears, and the taste of her beauty was salt on my lips, and the pain of her beauty was gnawing at my heart, and I prayed that I might see her again."

At this point Huguette, who had been following the narrative with a feline ferocity, caught up a wine-jug and made to throw it at the poet's head, but was dexterously disarmed by Guy Tabarie before the vessel had time to quit her fingers. Sulkily she plumped herself down on her stool again, while Villon, quite unconscious of the averted peril, rambled on dreamily.

"And the incense tickled my nostrils and the painted saints sneered at me, and bits of rhymes and bits of prayers jigged in my brain and I felt as if I were drunk with some new and delectable liquor. And then she slipped out and I after her. She took the Holy Water from my fingers."

Villon's voice sank reverently and Huguette took advantage of the pause.

"I wish it had burned you to the bone," she

[illegible] sightedly. "Master Villon, [illegible]

[illegible] burned deeper than that, believe me. Outside, [illegible] God's steps, stood a yellow-haired, pink-faced [illegible] who greeted her and they ambled away together, I on their heels. Presently they came to a [illegible]way and in slips my quarry, and as she did so [illegible] turned to her squire and I saw her face again [illegible] lost it, for the tears came into my eyes." With [illegible] heavy sigh he turned to Louis. "I suppose you [illegible]der why I talk like this, but when my heart's in [illegible] mouth I must spit it out or it chokes me."

"I have learned to wonder at nothing," Louis [illegible]ted sagely. Villon picked up the dropped thread [illegible] tale.

[illegible] saluted the gallant and begged to know the [illegible] name. He took me for a madman, but he told [illegible]

[illegible] Huguette was on her legs again and [illegible] her eager face close to that of Villon as [illegible]

Villon's friends greeted this sally, and the fury it brought to Huguette's face. Louis, royally angered, made as if to rise in protest, but the heavy hand of Tristan fell on his shoulder and restrained him, and Villon, noticing his irritation, waved him down with a pacifying gesture.

"Now, now, my rum duke," he cried, "your loyalty need not take fire. It was not her majesty, but her name I shall keep to myself, though it is written on my shoulders in fair large blue and black bruises."

This statement stirred a murmur of surprise in the gathering. "Did the pink and gold popinjay beat you?" Montigny asked, interpreting the general curiosity.

"No, no," Villon answered. "It came about thus. We tinkers of verses set a price on our wares that few find them worth, yet with the love-fever in my veins I wrote rhymes to this lady and sent them to her fairly writ on a piece of parchment that cost me a dinner."

"Did you think she would come to your whistle like a bird to a lure?" Louis enquired playfully. Villon sighed again.

"In this kind of madness a minstrel thinks himself a new Orpheus who could win a woman out of hell with his music. But I got my answer—oh, I got my answer."

[illegible] the taste of the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] the adventure. Meanwhile, looking [illegible] [illegible] gave Villon a clap on the back which made [illegible] think, and shouted "What was the answer?" [illegible] Villon began to laugh, a loud, mirthless laugh [illegible] had no human warmth in it.

[illegible] fellow like a page boarded me here three [illegible] ago. He asked me if I had sent certain verses [illegible] certain quarter. If so I was to follow him at [illegible] I followed like a sheep with my heart drum[illegible] [illegible]ll we came to a quiet place, and there four [illegible] with yard-long cudgels fell upon me. I was [illegible] unawares, I had no weapon but my jack[illegible] The blows were raining upon me as fast as [illegible] in a high wind, so I thought it no shame to [illegible] my heels. The varlets pursued me, full cry, [illegible] [illegible] to a part of Paris where their [illegible] [illegible] have been worth a minstrel's [illegible] [illegible] their chase. But I [illegible]

"It will teach me not to play the fool again," Villon answered sadly. "The mark of the beast is upon me and I shall dream no more dreams." He shook himself as if he were trying to shake away clinging memories and extended his empty can to Montigny, saying: "I'm thirsty again. More liquor."

As Montigny filled up for his leader, Louis commented, "You drink more than is good for your health, sir." Villon rounded on him angrily, with flushed face and shining eyes.

"Mind your own business!" he shouted, and the rest shouted with him applaudingly. "What can a man do but drink when France is going to the devil, with the Burgundians camped in the free fields where I played in childhood, and a nincompoop sits on the throne and lets them besiege his city?" The rascals laughed. Tristan whispered to himself, "You'll be sorry you spoke, Master Villon." The king propounded a problem. "No doubt you could do better than the king if you wore the king's shoes?"

Villon rolled about on his barrel in an ecstasy of entertainment. "If I could not do better than Louis Do-Nothing, Louis Dare-Nothing, having his occasions and advantages, may Huguette there never kiss me again."

[illegible] laughed. "[illegible] Perhaps she never will."

[illegible] came sidling and bridling up to Louis, [illegible] like a cat as she said: "Our François has [illegible] rhyme of it, sir, how he would carry himself [illegible] the king's shoes."

[illegible] was always ready for any kind of gallantry. [illegible] his arms around the girl's slim body and [illegible] on to his knee. "Has he, indeed, pretty [illegible]?" he said. "May we not hear it, Master [illegible]

[illegible], with mock modesty, had tried to restrain [illegible] from speaking of the work, but now he [illegible] his tune. "You may; you shall; for 'tis a [illegible] though it would cost me my neck if it [illegible] king's ears, very likely. But you are [illegible] to whisper in them, so here goes."

[illegible] Villon sprang to his feet, draped his [illegible] closely about him, struck a com[illegible], and began to recite with great [illegible] Louis scooped his claw-like fingers be[illegible] that he might hear the better the words [illegible] wild poet's mouth:

From Paris to the Breton sea,
And back again to Norman strand,
Forsooth ye seem a silly band,
Sheep without shepherd, left to chance—
Far otherwise our Fatherland
If Villon were the King of France!"

Louis glanced grimly at Tristan; the rogues rubbed their hands and chuckled. Villon smiled in pride and went on:

"The figure on the throne you see
Is nothing but a puppet, planned
To wear the regal bravery
Of silken coat and gilded wand.
Not so we Frenchmen understand
The Lord of lion's heart and glance,
And such a one would take command
If Villon were the King of France!"

The king's face was a study in sardonics. Tristan was poppy-red with rage. The gang applauded and Villon glowed with their applause.

"His counsellors are rogues, Perdie!
While men of honest mind are banned,
To creak upon the Gallows Tree,
Or squeal in prisons over-mann'd;

[illegible] cried by [illegible]

[illegible] the damned Burgundians [illegible]

[illegible] Where the Oriflamme should shield [illegible]

If Villon were the King of France!"

[illegible] and cans clattered approval. The rhymer's [illegible] widened as he drew breath to blow forth the [illegible] of his ballade.

"Louis the Little, play the grand;

Buffet the foe with sword and lance;

'Tis what would happen, by this hand,

If Villon were the King of France!"

[illegible] of enthusiasm came from the full throats [illegible] band. Montigny slapped Villon on the back [illegible] "Well crowed, Chanticleer!" Huguette flung [illegible] around him and hugged him as she cried [illegible]: "I forgive you much, for that light in [illegible]"

[illegible] poet seemed weary after so much heat. [illegible] the girl away and drooped on his hogs[illegible] [illegible] rogues rattled away to their table again, [illegible] was left alone with Louis, who ques[illegible]: "You call yourself a patriot, I

mug of wine. He turned to the king, passing his hand over his forehead. "By no such high-sounding title," he answered. "I am but a poor devil with a heart too big for his body and a hope too large for his hoop. Had I been begotten in a brocaded bed, I might have led armies and served France; have loved ladies without fear of cudgellings, and told kings truths without dread of the halter, while as it is, I consort with sharps and wantons, and make my complaint to a dull little buzzard like you, old noodle! Oh, 'tis a fool's play and it were well to be out of it."

"You won't have long to worry," Tristan muttered to himself under his breath, and found great comfort in the thought. Louis merely said: "You are sententious!"

Villon took him up swiftly. "The quintessence of envy, no less. I have great thoughts, great desires, great ambitions, great appetites, what you will. I might have changed the world and left a memory. As it is I sleep in a garret under the shadow of the gallows, and shall be forgotten to-morrow, even by the wolves I pack with. But this is dry thinking; let's to drinking!" As he spoke Villon rose to join his comrades, when his quick eye noted that Robin Turgis had fallen asleep on his bench. Villon skipped lightly toward him, dexterously unhooked

[illegible] Tristan looked after [illegible]

[illegible] Tristan leaned forward and plucked [illegible] sleeve. "Shall I hang him to-morrow?" [illegible] heavily. The king turned, [illegible] [illegible]. "We shall see! He is a [illegible] fellow, but he might have been a [illegible]. He has [illegible] babbling of my dream. I was a swine [illegible] the streets of Paris and I found a pearl—well, [illegible] kill the time with cards till Thibaut d'Aussigny comes." Tristan produced a pack of cards [illegible] his pouch and laid them on the table. "Do you think he will come?" he asked.

"[illegible] does not expect to find me here, I promise [illegible]," Louis answered. "He would not come if he [illegible] Olivier is to warn me of his coming."

[illegible] the inn door opened a little and the king, [illegible] the click of the catch, asked: "Is that he?" [illegible] glanced round over his shoulder. The [illegible] partly open, and an old, stooped [illegible] darkness into the room. [illegible]

his satisfaction. He made an imperative gesture to his companion to seat himself and in a few seconds had forgotten everything else in the excitement of the game. Meanwhile the old woman, having pushed the door wide open, came softly into the room. She was a quiet, mild-faced creature, one of those human shadows who suggest without tragedy faded youth and withered comeliness. She was very poorly but very neatly dressed, in worn grey and rusty black, and the linen folds about her lined face were scrupulously clean. She looked anxiously around her, shading her eyes with her hand, in the dim light of the tavern, unable to discern much but evidently eager to discern something.

René de Montigny, tired of teasing Isabeau, suddenly looked up and caught sight of the old woman as she stood, very helpless and wistful, peering about her. An impish spirit floated leaf-like on the surface of his mind. He rose to his feet and danced towards her in a fantastic manner, sweeping her a profound salutation as he approached her.

"Your pleasure, sweet princess?" he said with mock deference.

The old woman turned her wrinkled visage up to his in wonder.

"Is Master François Villon in this company, sir?" she faltered.

[illegible] exclaimed, for example, [illegible] [illegible] inquire."

He turned to his companions at the table [illegible] eye rested mockingly on the bowed figure of the [illegible]. After Master Villon had told his tale the [illegible] had been glum enough, and her companions, [illegible] her snappish wisely left her to herself. She had pulled a pack of cards from her scarlet [illegible] and had been spelling out her fortune silently, and the death card insisted itself again and again with [illegible] pertinacity. With a sense of despair that was strange to her airy nature she had bowed her head on her arms and was sobbing softly to herself. [illegible] was not a man to be touched by a woman's [illegible]. He mockingly gesticulated over her bent shoulders as he cried to the others in a false whisper, "There is a beautiful woman at the door, beneath [illegible] François."

[illegible] these words fell on Huguette's ears, [illegible] her into life and activity. She leaped [illegible] a flash.

[illegible] do you say?" she raged, and then, seeing a [illegible] form a few feet away from her, she rushed [illegible] the stranger fiercely while the others rose [illegible] in [illegible] new excitement.

"What do you seek here?" she asked fiercely of the old woman, and then as she saw the pitiful wrinkled face staring up at her, she started back in surprise.

The old woman, misinterpreting the sex of her questioner from the dress that Huguette wore, began apologetically.

"Asking your pardon, young gentleman," and for a moment her words were drowned in a shout of delighted laughter, as the listening rogues appreciated the blunder she had made.

"Asking your pardon, young gentleman, I seek Master François Villon."

Huguette snapped at her impatiently, "Seek him and find him." Then turning to René, she cried, "Montigny, you beast!" and with her hand on her dagger, made hotly for him.

Montigny, grinning like a delighted monkey, skipped for safety, dodging her around the table, while the others perceiving a victim in the bewildered old woman, joined hands in a ring and began dancing wildly around her, singing a ribald song. The old woman, as frightened and timid as a mouse might be if it suddenly found itself the centre of a circle of dancing cats, stood still.

At this moment the cellar door opened, and

[illegible] wine. Perceiving that the [illegible] in his heavy sleep, he smiled delightedly to himself, closed the cellar door softly and placed his [illegible] in the corner of the fireplace nearest to the [illegible]. The noise of the tumult attracted him from his successful plunder, and looking up, he became [illegible] of what was happening. In a second his tow-[illegible] mien changed, and dashing into the dancing [illegible], he struck Jehan le Loup a heavy blow with his bunch of keys, which felled him to the ground [illegible] log. In a moment the cluster of ruffians [illegible], and Villon caught the old woman in his [illegible]

"[illegible] you, chubs!" he shouted at them. "It's [illegible]." Then as he drew the trembling old [illegible] towards the fireplace, he whispered in her [illegible] "Don't be frightened, mammy, they meant no [illegible]

[illegible] hang-dog air of contrition was on the [illegible] of the members of the gang as they [illegible] and eyed the mother and son shame-[illegible] Isabelle, who had a wholesome dislike [illegible] followed quietly into the cool street by [illegible] to some place where the atmosphere [illegible]

Robin Turgis wakened from his heavy sleep, clapped his hand instinctively to his girdle and found that his keys were missing.

"My keys! my keys!" he shouted—"where are my keys?" And then, catching sight of them where they lay by the prostrate form of Jehan le Loup, he rushed forward and secured them greedily.

By this time Jehan le Loup had recovered the senses which Villon's swinging blow had knocked out of him and was crawling slowly into a sitting posture. He glared ferociously at Master François and his evil right hand stole to the pommel of his dagger.

"You have cracked my crown, curse you," he grunted, and then swiftly sprang to his feet with the bare blade in his hand and rushed at his assailant. But Villon was too alert to be taken unawares. He had not time to draw his sword, but in a second he had snatched a spit from the fire and extending it scientifically kept Jehan le Loup at arm's length. Huguette seized Jehan by the dagger arm.

"She is his mother!" she said angrily. "You all had mothers, I suppose? Let him alone!"

Jehan le Loup unwillingly sheathed his weapon; Huguette dragged him back to the table; Villon replaced the spit, which had somewhat burned his

"Did they frighten you, mammy?" he [illegible] "[illegible] they meant no harm. Boys and girls, [illegible] boys."

The old woman put her arms tightly about him. Villon grimaced. Her loving touch was as painful as a hostile one to his bruised body, but he made no attempt to repress her embrace.

"Come home, François," she said. "Come home. Where have you been these three days?"

Villon caressed the old woman very tenderly, as he answered:

"Very busy, mammy—state secrets. Mum's the word. How did you find me out?"

"They told me at the Unicorn," the old woman said, "that I might find you here."

Villon made a gesture of contempt.

"Oh, the Unicorn is no longer fashionable. They want payment on the nail there, confound them! Besides, this is nearer the walls and we can hear the Burgundians shouting. It is as good as a relish to our wine."

But Villon shook her grey head sadly.

"Come away," she entreated. "You have had

Villon contradicted her instantly.

"Never in my life, mammy. I have a fool's head and always get into my altitudes too soon."

Then, seeing the look of disappointment that made her grey old face look greyer still, he added, "I cannot come home just now, mammy, but there is something I can do for you. Do you remember when I was a little child——"

Something in the words made him stop suddenly. The hideous contrast between the phrase and the place wherein he was, between the mother who fondled him and the wild men-savages and women-savages who were his daily friends and who were drinking and dicing behind him at the other side of the settle, came upon him like a great wave of pain and knocked the mirth out of him. He turned away from his mother and repeated to himself dismally, "God! when I was a little child!" The mother's pity, the mother's protection immediately asserted themselves.

"You were the prettiest child woman ever bore," she said, softly.

Villon turned towards her again, while he tried to wink the tears out of his eyes.

"You used to sing me to sleep," he said, and as he spoke he rocked her slowly backward and forward

children to sleep, "Do, do, Pauline, do,
dormira, tantôt."

ll, mammy, your dutiful son has made a song
to sing yourself to sleep with. I went to
the other day. Oh, on my honour, I did"—
in reply to a startled look of surprise that
the old woman's face—"and a prayer came
head—a prayer for you to say to our Lady."
old woman kissed him fondly on the forehead.
love bird," she said, and as she spoke a boy-
that had long been absent from Villon's
back to it for a moment.
it is," he said. "Listen." And he whispered
the verses he had made, while the old woman
herself reverentially.

Lady of Heaven, Queen of Earth,
Empress of Hell, I kneel and plead
pity, by the holy birth,
the humblest Christian of the Creed;
I cannot write; I cannot read;
I am a woman poor and old,
in the Church, where I behold
the gates of Paradise, I cry
to woman, make me bold
to live and die."

"There, mammy, there is a pretty prayer for you."

Mother Villon was dissolved in tears and sobbed on his shoulder.

"You should have been a good man," she said.

Villon stroked her hair very gently.

"We are as Heaven pleases, dear." He paused for a moment, then suddenly remembering the silver coin which he had confiscated from the king, he dipped his fingers into his pouch and produced it.

"Here is something for you, mammy," he said, and as the old woman, with a faint flush on her worn cheeks, seemed about to protest, he insisted. "Oh, yes. Take it, take it. It was honestly come by, and you will spend it more honestly than I should." He forced the coin into her lean, brown hand, and added, "Now run away, mammy, and pray yourself to sleep. You shall see me soon, I promise you."

He led her gently across the tavern floor to the door, which he opened for her. As she turned to go, she looked up to him and repeated two lines of his prayer:

> "Woman to woman, make me bold
> In thy belief to live and die."

As the door closed and Villon turned to come back to his seat, Jehan le Loup, who had been eyeing him

[illegible] the passage.

[illegible] young mouth for a change," he said, [illegible] the girl against the poet. Villon [illegible] [illegible] aside.

[illegible] the devil," he said angrily, and [illegible] Once again Jehan's hand sought his weapon [illegible] again he was restrained.

[illegible] is in one of his bad moods," said Isabeau. [illegible] him to himself," and she drew her reluctant [illegible] back to the table, while Villon seated [illegible] in a corner of the settle, staring into the fire.

[illegible] the moment the tavern door was thrust open [illegible] and Guy Tabarie rushed into the room, his [illegible] moon face sweating, his eyes bulging, his [illegible] of crimson locks flaming out from the egg-[illegible] of his bald head, his mighty belly sway-[illegible] a passion of excitement.

[illegible]!" he shrieked, at the top of his voice, [illegible] a fight at Fat Margot's between two [illegible] They are stripped to the waist and at it [illegible] and tongs. Come and see for the love of

[illegible] was afoot in an instant, clamantly [illegible] turned as he finished speaking

and rushed through the open door into the shining moonlit street. The rest trailed after him, wandering stars in the tail of a dishonourable comet, shouting, screaming, laughing, pushing, panting, eager for the promised sport.

"I'll crown the victor!" cried Montigny as he ran —and "I'll console the vanquished!" shouted Jehan le Loup, as he brought up the rear of the road and vanished, clattering, into the night. Only Huguette remained of all the fellowship, and she turned instinctively to Villon when he crouched over the dying fire.

"Will you come, François?" she whispered softly. Villon lifted his head for a moment from his hands to signify a refusal.

"Nay, I am reading."

Huguette blazed out at him a fierce "You lie!" which failed to move the poet from his melancholy resolve.

"A man may read without book," he said. "Go your ways, girl, and skelp both the hussies!" He drooped into a dejected heap again, oblivious of the girl, who looked at him half sadly, half angrily for an instant, and then disappeared in her turn into the causeway, calling upon her knavish heralds to wait for her.

[illegible] drinking [illegible] after the [illegible] [illegible], retired to his own quarters to [illegible] until custom should return. Louis and [illegible] deep in their cards, paid little heed to any [illegible].

"[illegible] barber tarries," Tristan said, after a pause.

"[illegible] game makes amends," Louis answered.

"[illegible] are winning, sire," Tristan grunted. The [illegible] chirruped merrily.

"[illegible] grandsire will be remembered longer than [illegible] kings for the sake of these wasters and winners [illegible] they made to soothe his madness."

[illegible] even as he spoke his mirth faded, for a turn [illegible] fortune gave Tristan an opportunity.

"[illegible] game, sire!" he said, and swept the stakes [illegible] his pocket.

The king fell into a frowning silence as Tristan [illegible] the cards again, and scrutinized his new hand [illegible] sombre care, as if the fate of Empire de[illegible] upon it. Scarcely a sound disturbed the [illegible] quiet of the room. Master François Villon [illegible] in his settle corner, sucked a long noiseless [illegible] from his stolen jug and meditated drear[illegible] wine and weariness his head was be[illegible]. His head felt as heavy as lead and [illegible] as a wind-tumbled

feather. Two women's faces danced before his eyes, one proud and beautiful and young, the other humble and pitiful and old, and he tried his best to shut both of them out of his senses. Vaguely he tried to shape a ballade, a noble ballade in honour of all things good to eat. He had got at least an excellent overword. "A dish of tripe's the best of all." He mouthed the line with a relish, but his eyes were seeing straws and his stubbled chin scraped his breast. There came a click at the latch, but he did not heed it. He would scarcely have heeded a Burgundian cannon shot; he had drifted into a lumpish doze. And yet the way of the world depended, for him, upon that lift of a latch.

CHAPTER III

THE COMING OF KATHERINE

door opened and a woman entered the room, [illegible] closely muffled after the fashion adopted [illegible] ladies when they walked abroad in Paris [illegible] fifteenth century. She was followed by an [illegible] serving-man to whom she turned and spoke [illegible] whisper as she paused upon the threshold.

"You are sure this is the place?" she asked, and [illegible] answered—

"Sure!"

"Wait outside!" the muffled lady commanded, and [illegible] servant with an obeisance stepped back into the [illegible]. The woman looked cautiously about her, only [illegible] bright eye showing over the lifted fold of her [illegible]. Villon was hidden from her while he sat; [illegible] was no one in her view save the two men [illegible] cards. She came cautiously forward and [illegible] Tristan, who was nearest to her, on the [illegible]. He swung round, with hooded face, to an- [illegible] challenge, and as he did so Louis took [illegible] of his turned back to examine Tristan's [illegible] he had laid upon the table, and to sub- [illegible] his own hand for one of his

"Has Master François Villon been here to-night?" the woman asked. Her voice was full and sweet, and Tristan knew it well though he listened unmovably. She had lowered her cloak enough to allow him a glimpse of a young, lovely face, but he needed no glimpse to assure him.

"Yonder he squats by the hearth," he answered, masking his own voice with hoarseness and jerking his thumb towards the settle. The girl's eyes followed the signal and saw for the first time the huddled figure on the bench. "I thank you," she said simply, and moved away into the background, her eyes fixed on the crouching form, her fingers clasped nervously, waiting an impatient patience upon resolution.

Tristan leaned hurriedly over to the king.

"Zounds, sire! do you know who that was?"

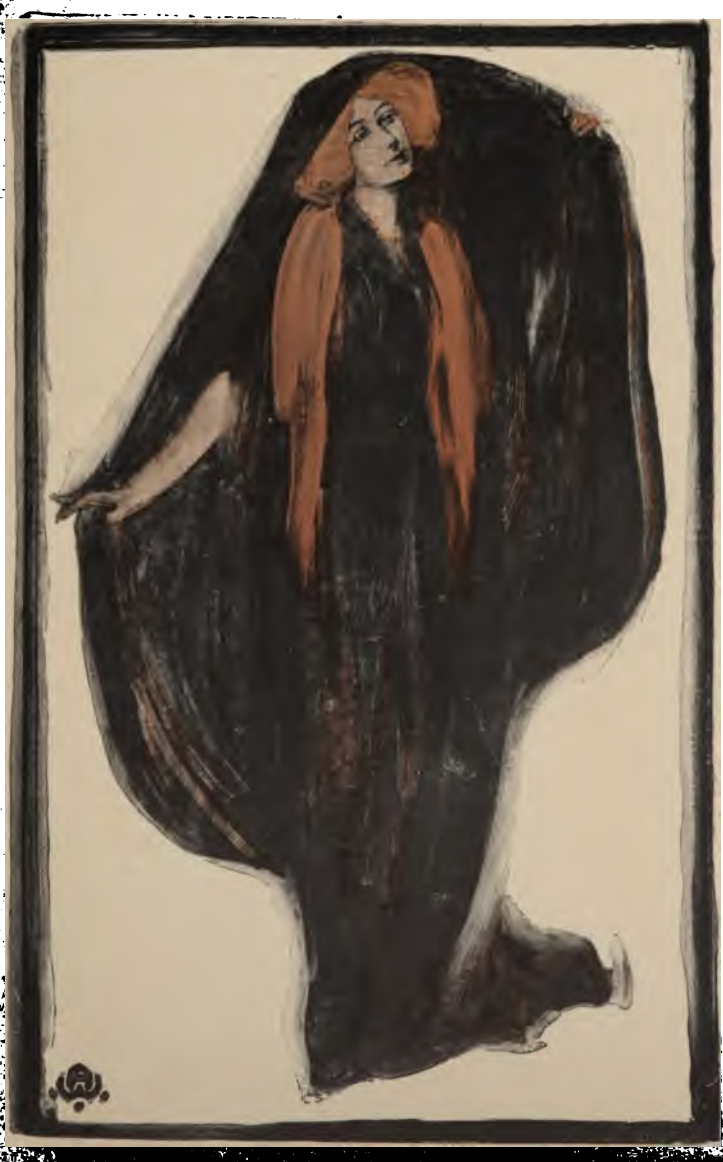
Louis, smiling at his adopted cards, answered carelessly, "Some bonaroba who took you for a gull," but Tristan's next words pricked him from his indifference.

"It was your majesty's kinswoman, the Lady Katherine de Vaucelles."

The king rose cautiously to his feet.

"Oh, ho, Oh, ho!" he chuckled. "Does lovely Katherine come to meet Thibaut?"

"She seeks François Villon, sire."



The woman bent towards him again and whispered "A word with you."

Villon rose wearily to his feet, and as he did so the woman drew back towards the open centre of the room, which now appeared to her to be empty. Her nerves were too highly strung to note anything surprising in the disappearance of the two visitors. If she thought of them at all it was only to be glad that they had gone their ways and left the place so lonely. Villon followed her almost unconsciously, too sleepy for wonder. Suddenly the woman threw off the folds that muffled her face and the vision that had haunted him flashed on his frightened eyes, the vision so proud, so beautiful and young. He crossed himself as he questioned in a voice that sounded strangely alien to him, "Are you real?"

"Do I look like a ghost?" the fair woman answered.

In an ecstasy of joy Villon fell on his knees as he seldom kneeled in prayer, while he gasped,

"If this be a dream, pray Heaven I may never wake."

The girl drew from her bosom a little piece of folded parchment and held it out towards him.

"You wrote me these verses. My elders tell me that poets say much and mean little; that their oaths

[illegible] easily swallowed. "Are you such a dream?"

[illegible]ation rose to his feet. He knew that this exquisite presence was flesh and blood; that her speech was human speech. He answered her very gravely—

"My words are life. I love you!"

"Just because I show a smooth face?"

A great wave of rapture swept over the poet's soul and his brain seemed as busy with words as a hive with bees. He spoke slowly like a man inspired.

"Because you are the loveliest she alive. If all my dreams of loveliness had been pieced together into one perfect woman she would have been like you. All my life I have read tales of love and tried to find the secret in the bright eyes about me—tried and failed. I might as well have been seeking for the holy Grail. But when I saw you the old Heaven and the old Earth seemed to shrivel away and I knew what love might mean, and God-like desire and God-like surrender. The world is changed by your coming, all sweet tastes and fair colours and sounds have something of you in them. I see you, I see and hear in your honour. The people in the street are blessed because you have passed among them. That stone on the ground is sacred because your foot has touched it; or the dusty leaves of

the corner, which your sleeve has brushed in passing. I love you! All philosophy, all wisdom, religion, honour, manhood, hope, beauty lie in those words—I love you!"

The girl looked at him with wide eyes, quite fearless, much astonished, as a brave maid might look at some wild beast of the woods that came in her way. But the purport of his words seemed to please her, for she answered him quickly and readily.

"Well, I have come to you to put your protestations to the proof. If you meant every word you said, every syllable, every letter, you can serve me well. If not, good-nlght and good-bye."

And with these words she moved a little as if she were ready to say farewell to him then and there. Villon put forward an appealing hand that stayed her.

"I wrote with my heart's blood," he protested, and even a green girl could not fail to read the truth in his voice. Now she came close to him, speaking very low but very distinctly.

"Listen. I am one of the Queen's ladies; Thibaut d'Aussigny, the Grand Constable of France, loves me a little and my broad lands much. He wills that I should marry him. He tried to force me to his will, to shame me to his pleasure, and so I hate him, and

[illegible] you, for it was he who gave you [illegible] ring."

[illegible]llon, who had been listening to her in wonder, [illegible] as if he had been struck anew.

"Oh, it was he?" he interrupted. The girl came a [illegible] closer, became a little more confidential.

"He gave your rhymes to me and told me how you [illegible] been treated. When I read them I said—here, if [illegible] speaks truth, is the one man in France who [illegible] help me."

Villon drew himself back with a little shiver of [illegible]. The fumes of wine, the fumes of wonder [illegible] drifting away from him, leaving him face to [illegible] with naked, amazing reality.

"[illegible], not your yellow-haired, pink-faced lover?" [illegible]. Katherine frowned disdain.

"[illegible] le Jolys is a man many women might love, [illegible] no man; I only hate Thibaut d'Aussigny. [illegible] understand?"

"[illegible] to understand," Villon answered, sadly. [illegible] came nearer to Villon. Her face was [illegible] in the dim light, and a fleeting image of the [illegible] teased his fancy. Her lips were as [illegible], as the ruby of a bishop's ring, and [illegible] Venus. So it was he, who [illegible] the maiden who was [illegible]

strange unmaiden-like words in a clear, steel-like whisper.

"Kill Thibaut d'Aussigny. You are a skillful swordsman, they say. You are little better than an outlaw. You say you love me more than life. Kill Thibaut d'Aussigny!"

Villon looked at her queerly. To save his life he could not keep his face from quivering. He was eating his heart and it tasted very bitter, and his own voice sounded far away to him, like a voice heard in a dream.

"So that you and Noel what's his name may live happily ever after?"

Katherine drew back from him, a little scorn in her eyes and on her lips.

"Are you less eager to serve me than you were?"

The question struck him in the breast like the stroke of a sword. He remembered his golden vows and his golden verses, and sickened at his shadow of disloyal doubt and anger.

"No, by Heaven, but I've been dozing and dreaming, and I've got to rub the sleep out of my eyes and the dream out of my heart. Tell me how to serve you."

She was reassured on the instant and neared him again confidently.

[illegible] Now, before in disguise, for I never [illegible] followed. I think he means to betray the [illegible] Gaudy, so you will serve France as well as [illegible] So such men as you kill each other?"

[illegible]illon looked at her ironically out of the corner [illegible] eyes; answered her ironically out of the corner [illegible] mouth. He saw himself as she saw him, and [illegible] sadly entertained at the sight.

"Generally in a drunken scuffle. Will you wait [illegible] till he comes, pretty lady, for I never saw him? [illegible] leave the rest to me."

[illegible]mething in his voice, though it was firm and [illegible] seemed to touch the girl's ear more than any [illegible] he had yet uttered. A new curiosity seemed [illegible] in her eyes and there was almost a sound of [illegible] her speech.

"[illegible] love me very much?" she asked softly. [illegible] drew himself up proudly and answered her [illegible]

"[illegible] all the meaning that the word can have in [illegible]."

[illegible] shade of colour came into the woman's [illegible] cheeks.

"[illegible] expect to be taken at your word?"

[illegible] and his eyes were dancing.

"I didn't hope to be, I will try to be worthy of the honour."

The girl's eyes shone with wonder.

"You love and laugh in the same breath," she asserted.

Villon made a deprecatory gesture with his hands, half in protest, half in approval.

"That is my philosophy."

This view of life seemed to astonish her not a little. She caught her breath for a moment, then suddenly glided close to him.

"If you wish," she said in an even whisper, "you may kiss me once."

All the blood in the man's heart seemed to turn to fire and flame into his face as he turned towards her, making as if he would take her face in his hands and seal his soul upon her mouth. Then he sharply flung himself away from her.

"Nay, I can fight and if needs must die in your quarrel, but if once I touched your lips—that would make life too sweet to adventure."

The woman's face had flushed a little at her offer: it now paled again.

"As you will," she said, and as she spoke there came the noise of shouting, singing and trampling feet outside. The poet dropped in a moment from

[illegible] world.

[illegible] are my friends returning," he said. "They [illegible] see you. Come this way." As he spoke he [illegible] her hand and drew her across the room to the [illegible] that led to the upper gallery. On the gallery [illegible] her wait.

[illegible] you can see without being seen. When he [illegible] show him to me. Then you can reach the [illegible] by this passage."

[illegible] as he spoke the main door was dashed open [illegible] wild rout foamed into the room, bubbling [illegible] hilaration, Huguette leaping like a bubble on [illegible] of their enthusiasm. Louis and Tristan [illegible] advantage of the confusion to emerge from their [illegible] places and resume their seats at their table.

"[illegible] was rare sport while it lasted," Colin [illegible]

"[illegible] didn't last long enough," Jehan yelled.

"[illegible] took a different turn when you came," [illegible] Montigny said, patting the girl on the [illegible] lovingly. Huguette shook her long hair [illegible] eyes and laughed as she turned down her [illegible]

[illegible] Tristan looked up and heard both the

Robin Turgis was prompt; flagons and pipkins rattled as the men and women gathered round their table and renewed their drinking and dicing with fresh zest from the scuffle they had just witnessed. Guy Tabarie laughed one of his long fat laughs as he lingered over memory's picture of the way Huguette had trussed and trounced each of the amazons. "Lord, how they squeaked and wriggled!" he said unctuously.

Louis whispered to his companion.

"Our mad poet may do me a good turn, Gossip Tristan."

Even as he spoke the inn door opened and a man entered—a small man, plainly clad, with his hood about his face. He glanced about him anxiously till he caught sight of Louis and Tristan, for whom he made immediately. Villon, craning over the balustrade, saw him and touched the girl on the arm to call her attention to the new-comer.

"Is that he?" he whispered. The girl shook her head.

"No, no. Thibaut is a big man. Yet that figure seems familiar."

The stranger came to the table and stooped between Louis and Tristan. Louis looked up and grinned recognition of his barber, Olivier le Dain.

followed his footsteps all the way, till I [illegible] "Here he comes!"

[illegible]ger on lip Olivier glided through the door [illegible]ch Tristan had been concealed a few mo[illegible] before. The king rubbed his hands and [illegible]. Even Tristan looked pleased.

CHAPTER IV

ENTER THIBAUT

ONCE again the door swung on its hinges admitting a very tall, powerful man, dressed like a common soldier, his brawny bulk panoplied in steel and leather. He glanced about him as he entered, exchanged looks with René de Montigny and came down to the settle, where he flung his vast body with a clatter while he called to the landlord in a bull's bellow to bring him some wine.

Katherine leaning and looking gave a little gasp. "That is he!" she breathed into Villon's ear.

Villon gave an involuntary sigh, partly indeed of satisfaction at the thought that his quarry was before him, a very vast and royal stag for a hunter's hand to threaten, but partly too of exquisite regret. It had been very sweet to crouch there in the darkness of the stairway so close to the one fair woman of all the world, to feel her breath upon his cheek, almost to hear her heart-beats, to know that once if only for once they were alone together and allied in a common purpose, to feel the touch of her soft gown, to know that if he chose he could touch her hair with his outstretched hand. Those seconds

[illegible] seemed to be worth all the [illegible] now they had come to an end. Man[illegible] that he deserved them. "Good," he [illegible] leaving her side he softly descended the [illegible] cat-foot across the tavern floor and in[illegible] himself dexterously into the society of his [illegible] who were by this time far too mad and [illegible] show any surprise at his sudden re-appear[illegible] to question whence he came. Only one of [illegible]ship was away from the board—René de [illegible], who had risen as soon as the soldier had [illegible] seat by the fireplace, and had come down to [illegible] in a seemingly careless, off-hand fashion. [illegible]terously moving from friend to friend [illegible] to niche himself by the back of the settle [illegible] could catch some of the words that passed [illegible]ontigny and the stranger, whose meeting [illegible] subject of unsuspected scrutiny on the [illegible] burgesses who sat apart and [illegible] now gave heed.

[illegible] friend," Montigny said [illegible]

Then as the soldier stared at him he hastened to explain.

"My quip. The shooting star was a Burgundian arrow a cloth-yard long which came winging its way over the walls at noon and made itself at home in my garden. Here is what the arrow carried."

He pulled from his pouch a small piece of parchment folded and sealed, and handed it to the seeming soldier. The disguised constable took the missive and scanned it narrowly.

"The seal has not been tampered with," he said to himself. René caught him up with a noble gesture of indignation.

"I never read other people's letters," he protested.

Thibaut shrugged his shoulders.

"It would have profited you little if you had," he said, as he broke the seal and turning aside stooped a little to read by the faint fire light what the letter said. It was couched in words that seemed commonplace enough, but Thibaut knew their secret meaning, knew that the Duke of Burgundy would do all that he asked, give him a duchy, give him the girl he coveted, all that he might ask for or lust for if he would only play the traitor and deliver Louis into the Duke of Burgundy's hands. As this was precisely what Thibaut was resolved to do, a pleased

[illegible] his eyes as he turned [illegible] [illegible] the glowing ashes and watched it with [illegible] thoughtfulness. He turned to Montigny, who was [illegible] him attentively.

"Can you command some safe rogues of your kind, who think better of Burgundian gold than of the fool on the throne?"

Montigny answered him behind his hand. "Aye, I know of half a dozen stout lads who would pilfer the king from his palace of the Louvre if they were paid well enough for the job," and he jerked his thumb over his shoulder in the direction of his carousing comrades. Thibaut nodded approval. He thrust some gold into Montigny's ready palm, whispered to him to meet him again to-morrow, and as Montigny rejoined his friends he turned to leave the tavern.

To his surprise he found himself confronted by Villon, who feigning intoxication barred his passage with an air of great hilarity. "You walk abroad late, honest soldier," he hiccoughed.

"That's my business," Thibaut answered, trying to pass, but Villon still delayed him.

"Don't be testy. Come and crack a bottle."

"I've had enough, and you've had more than enough," Thibaut growled. "Go to bed!"

Villon's false good humour changed in a clap.

"You're a damned uncivil fellow, soldier, and don't know how to treat a gentleman when you see one."

Thibaut began to lose patience.

"Get out of the way!" he said, and gave Villon a little push with his open hand that made him stagger. Villon's voice rose to a yell.

"I will not get out of the way! How do I know you are an honest soldier? How do I know that you are a true man?"

As Villon's voice rose the altercation attracted the attention of the revellers. Montigny glided to Villon's side and whispered him.

"Let him alone, François; he's not what he seems."

"Seems! Who cares what he seems?" Villon shouted. "It's what he is I want to know. Perhaps he's not an honest soldier at all. Perhap's he's a damned Burgundian spy!"

Thibaut lifted his hand to crush Villon, but the poet's naked dagger menaced him and he paused.

"Fling this drunken dog into the street," he commanded angrily. Villon's friends snapped at him furiously. Villon flung back the phrase.

"Drunken dog, indeed! You are a lying, ill-

[illegible] a bailiff [illegible]

[illegible] and the [illegible], every [illegible]

[illegible] a fighter, every [illegible]

[illegible] de Montigny, who, [illegible]

himself from the [illegible] of his companions [illegible]

the side door and slipped out of it [illegible]

confusion. It was his intention to [illegible]

and intervene for the protection of his powerful

patron, and with this purpose in his mind he [illegible]

plunged into the darkness of the street and ran as [illegible]

as his legs could carry him.

In the meantime the quarrel at the [illegible]

[illegible] Thibaut, glaring at his enemies as a [illegible]

[illegible] pack of baiting dogs, asked savagely of the

[illegible] who was brandishing his sword:

"[illegible] the devil are you?"

[illegible] Tony had heard back defiantly and

[illegible] sword.

[illegible] Villon, who was [illegible] in no [illegible]

[illegible]

asking for the weapon he asked for. Villon snatched up a mug and flung the heel taps in the soldier's face, spotting his cheeks with drops of crimson that trickled on to his breast plate. With a choking cry of rage Thibaut dragged his sword into the air.

"You fool," he hissed, "I'll kill you!"

"We shall see," Villon answered gallantly, as he stood on guard alert and wary.

For a moment the he-rascals and she-rascals held their breath. The great figure in the shining steel seemed so to dominate the slight frame of their favourite that anything like an equal contest between the two men seemed little less than ridiculous. What skill of Villon's could hope to avail against the mighty sweep of that huge soldier's weapon? Suddenly the swift spirit of Huguette solved the problem. Springing forward with the delicate agility of a young panther, she poised, opinionative, between the opponents.

"Fair play!" she screamed. "This is David and Goliath," and as she spoke she pointed with one hand at Villon while with the other she struck with her open palm a ringing blow on the cuirass of Villon's antagonist. "Let them fight it out with sword and lantern in the dark."

[illegible]

[illegible] "Great Fandoria, [illegible]

[illegible] in the two compartments, [illegible]

[illegible], and Wilton himself, eager and [illegible]

the combat, was keen enough to see how [illegible]

only might work for the surety of his purpose. [illegible]

[illegible], tricks of fence, all things were equal [illegible]

[illegible] fought as shadows in shadowland.

"What do you say, Goliath?" he laughed, [illegible]

grim face of Thibaut smiled responsive. [illegible]

"As you please," he said, serenely confident in his strength and length of arm. "It is all one to me." [illegible] then suddenly looking round on the leading [illegible] fixed about him a width girdle of [illegible] [illegible] back his agreement and held it for a moment. "On this condition," he added, "if ever there [illegible] [illegible] you, there is an end of the quarrel." "You [illegible] have must agree to that."

Wilton agreed on the instant. He was all the [illegible] the world of Thibaut, but he waited in [illegible] a moment for the sake of the white girl crouching [illegible]

"[illegible]," he said, "for myself will do [illegible]" [illegible] to the girl, he laughed, "Fear [illegible]

[illegible] contemptuous [illegible]

"That is settled," said Villon. "Now, friends, make a ring and dowse the glim."

In another instant, the preparations for the combat were afoot, Robin Turgis, angrily protesting against the desecration of his orderly hostelry and shouting wild words about summoning the watch, was promptly overpowered by Jehan le Loup, who forced him on to a bench and kept him there with a dagger's point at his throat. The women huddled, screaming and excited, on the stairway a little below the place where Katherine crouched, holding her breath and peeping through the railings. The men stood behind tables and on benches, while Casin Cholet and Colin de Cayeulx dived into the landlord's quarters and reappeared bearing each in his hand a lighted lantern. While these preparations were being hurried toward, Tristan, full of alarm, leaned forward and plucked at the king's mantle.

"This must be put a stop to, sire," he whispered; but the king shook his head with a grim smile of satisfaction.

"On the contrary, gossip," he answered, "whichever of these rascals kills the other, does the state a service and saves the hangman some labour."

Villon crossed the room and came close to where Thibaut waited sullen. "I think I shall square our

[illegible] stared at him. "You [illegible] your varlets thumped me yesterday," Villon [illegible] replied. "I shall tickle you to-day. Turn, [illegible] about, friend Thibaut."

[illegible] as he spoke Guy Tabarie puffed out the last candle left alight in the room, which was plunged instantly into almost total darkness. Even the pale moonlight that had come through the window was swiftly veiled by Huguette, who drew the [illegible] curtains close together. The dim light from the [illegible] seemed to accentuate and intensify the darkness through which the two lanterns burned like planets of yellow fire, in the hands of [illegible] Villon snatched the one and Thibaut [illegible] other. There was a moment of intense silence [illegible] the voice of Huguette cried out of the [illegible] "Are you ready?"

[illegible] combatants cried, "Yes!" in the [illegible] and in the next the battle began.

[illegible] fight had ever been fought [illegible] or even perhaps within the [illegible] the dense obscurity the two [illegible] for each other, alternately guided [illegible] light of the lanterns, as their [illegible] in the air or [illegible]

concealed it under the fold of his mantle. Every now and then the swords would meet with a clash, there would be a hurried exchange of thrust and blow, and then the adversaries would drift back again to grope and gleam and seek each other anew, their lanterns flashing and disappearing like accentuated glow-worms, and their blades now shining in sudden illumination like streaks of blue lightning across the blackness and now invisible even to those who held them in their hands.

Tristan had in vain endeavoured to persuade the king to leave before the preliminaries for the fantastic strife had been completed, but Louis was firm in his determination to remain.

"I would not miss this for the world, man," he had insisted. All his childlike delight in the adventurous was being sated to the full this evening, and there was no happier man at that moment in the kingdom than the man who by strange fortune was its king.

The fight persisted for some minutes that seemed like hours to more than one of the anxious spectators. Now the room would be steeped in the deepest silence, and now, as the revealed lantern glowed and the naked weapons met, some woman's scream or some man's suppressed oath would fill the place with a sense of watching, eager humanity.

[illegible] and a voice shouted loudly, [illegible] in the king's name.

[illegible] knew well enough that the summons [illegible]. "It is the watch, sire," he whispered to the [illegible].

[illegible] too, groping for his nimble antagonist, [illegible] beginning to despair of crushing the man, heard [illegible] understood the summons. He was tired of the [illegible] struggle.

"Open the door!" he shouted noisily, and the cry [illegible] Villon to a more vehement assault. He [illegible] like a cat at the giant, flashed the lantern [illegible] in his eyes, and as Thibaut, furious, made [illegible] lunge at him, Villon dexterously swung his [illegible] to his enemy's sword point and in another [illegible] had driven his own blade into Thibaut's side. "[illegible] so fast, rat-catcher!" he shouted exultantly, [illegible] Thibaut fell with a heavy crash of rattling [illegible] the floor, the door was dashed open and [illegible] watch poured in with blazing torches, [illegible] with light and armoured men. [illegible] moment's glance of triumph at the [illegible] and glanced up at the

Katherine, standing, leaned over the balustrade and flung a knot of ribbon to her champion, who caught it as it skimmed through the air, pressed it to his lips and thrust it into the bosom of his jerkin. In another moment Katherine had disappeared and Villon found himself roughly held in the strong grasp of two soldiers, while the captain of the watch surveyed the scene with some astonishment, and the rogues were overawed by the bills of the new-comers.

"What is this tumult?" the captain demanded. Villon answered him airily, smiling over the crossed pikes that penned him.

"A fair fight, good captain, conducted according to the honourable laws of sword and lantern."

The captain of the watch turned his attention to Thibaut, who, assisted by one of the soldiers, had raised himself upon one elbow and was glaring vindictively at Villon.

"Who is this man?" he asked.

A desire for revenge got the better of the wounded man's discretion.

"I am Thibaut d'Aussigny," he gasped. "I am the Grand Constable."

A little shiver of surprise and alarm ran round the room at the sound of that dreaded name. The captain of the watch kneeled in salutation.

[illegible] for a moment. He pointed at Villon. "[illegible] follow and hang him on the nearest lamp-[illegible]" and as he spoke he swooned. Promptly the [illegible] turned towards his prisoner. "Take that [illegible] and hang him," he commanded curtly. [illegible] glanced wildly about for a way to escape and [illegible]. His friends gave a groan of sympathy, [illegible] could do no more, for the soldiers overawed. [illegible]gnette flung her arms about him, sobbing. [illegible] of his captors tightened and Villon shiv-[illegible] clasp. Suddenly the little insignificant [illegible] the table rose and advanced towards the [illegible]

[illegible] air," he said imperatively. "That young [illegible] is my affair." The soldier turned angrily [illegible] bewildered citizen.

[illegible] you," he growled, "who dare to inter-[illegible] this's justice?"

[illegible] pulled his heavy cap from his head and [illegible] wicked, eager visage that was so well

the astonished soldier bent the knee in homage. Villon, staring, dumfounded, caught the humour of the situation and could not hold his tongue.

"The king! Good Lord!" he said, and punctuated his comment with a prolonged whistle.

CHAPTER V

THE VOICES OF THE STARS

LOUIS loved roses. All that was royal in his [illegible] went out to the royal flower; whatever desire [illegible] lay hidden in his heart found its gratifica[illegible] in its splendid colours, in its splendid odours. [illegible] believed that the red rose only came into [illegible] the fair day when Venus, seeing Ascanius [illegible] on a bed of white roses, pressed handfuls [illegible] blossoms to her lips, and the pale petals [illegible] their crimson loveliness beneath the [illegible] the goddess. Louis the Eleventh knew [illegible] the legend, but the red rose was his fancy [illegible] of the royal garden was dedicated to [illegible] In the oldest part of the palace, hard [illegible] and ancient tower where the king loved [illegible] the stars and to brood over strange [illegible] by a terrace whose very stones [illegible]

the imperial purple of a Cæsar's pomp to the crimson so deep that it was almost black, black as the congealed blood on the torn thigh of Adonis. Here, when the stars eluded or deceived him, King Louis would come, creeping down the winding stairs of his tower, with the names of saints upon his thin lips, to breathe the sunlit or moonlit fragrance of his roses, to seek a little rest for his restless mind, a little quiet for his unquiet heart.

On the morning after his visit to the Fircone Tavern King Louis sat in his rose garden and snuffed the scented air with pleasure, while his keen eyes shifted from a scroll of parchment on his knee to the face of one who stood beside him, and spoke in a low voice, pointing as he spoke to marks and figures on the outspread parchment. The king's companion was an old man in a furred gown, whose countenance was seamed with years and study, and whose eyes seemed always to be gazing at objects that others could not see. In his right hand he held a large sphere of crystal, and whenever the king lapsed into silent study of his scroll the sage would lift the shining globe and gaze into its glassy depths with an air of exaggerated wisdom.

From one of these moments of abstraction the king suddenly looked up, and immediately the

[illegible] aspect of the planetary bodies,

[illegible] "and you know of the strange dreams

[illegible] dreamed three nights running."

[illegible] inclined his head gravely. The king had

[illegible] the dream in all its particulars at least

[illegible] that morning. It seemed to be mixed

[illegible] sunlight and the scent of the roses; to

[illegible] of the chorus of the birds. But he

[illegible] the narrative with the same air of sur-

[illegible]tion that he had offered to its first

[illegible]

[illegible] that I was a swine rooting in the

[illegible]ks, and that I found a pearl of great

[illegible] I set it in my crown, and it

[illegible] with its light. But it seemed to

[illegible] my forehead that I cast it from

[illegible]

The astrologer shook his head. "The stars are bright," he said slowly, "but their brightness is bewildering to mortal eyes and it is hard to read between the lines of their effulgence. Dreams are dim, and it is difficult for mortal minds to interpret their obscurity."

The king frowned. "I know well enough," he said, "that stars are bright and that dreams are dim, but your wisdom is clothed and housed and nourished for deeper knowledge than this. Interpret my dream for France as Joseph interpreted the vision of the Egyptian."

With an unmoved face the astrologer scanned the crystal. "Thus I seem to read the riddle of your dream, sire," he answered. "There is one in the depths who, if exalted to the heights, might do you great service and who yet might irk you so greatly that you would seek to cast him back again into the depths from which he rose. The stars seem to speak of such a coming, and, as it seems to me, this stranger should have potent influence for good for a period of seven days from this day. I have sought and sought in vain to see something of this man in the crystal. I only see confusedly great crowds of people, pageants and masques, and movings of many soldiers, battle and bloodshed, and great victory for

[illegible] silent for a moment; then with an [illegible] he dismissed the astrologer, who [illegible] and climbed the winding stairs [illegible] where he pursued his occult studies. [illegible] walked restlessly up and down, indifferent [illegible], thinking only of the stars.

"[illegible]ngois Villon were the king of France," [illegible]. "How that mad ballad maker glowed [illegible]. Fools are proverbially fortunate, and a [illegible] may save Paris for me as a mad maid [illegible]ce for my sire."

[illegible] behind him stirred him from his [illegible]. Turning, he beheld the companion of [illegible]ure of the previous evening.

"[illegible]ristan?" he questioned apprehensively, [illegible] had the evil smile on his face which [illegible] when he had news of any disaster.

The king shrugged his shoulders indifferently.

"I wish the duke joy of him," he said. "He is more dangerous to my enemy when he is on my enemy's side. Where are the rascals of last night?"

"The tavern rabble are in custody of Messire Noel."

"And my rival for royalty?"

"Barber Olivier has charge of him. I would have hanged the rogue out of hand."

"Your turn will come, gossip, never doubt it. But the stars warn me that I need this rhyming ragamuffin. There is a tale of Haroun al Raschid——"

Tristan stifled a yawn and a sneer. "Another tale, sire," he said with something like piteous protest, for the king's tales did not always entertain Tristan.

Louis went on, however, indifferent to his companion's feelings:

"How he picked a drunken rascal from the streets and took him to his palace. When the rascal woke sober, the courtiers persuaded him that he was the Caliph, and the Commander of the Faithful found great sport in his behaviour. I promise myself a like diversion."

Tristan stared in surprise. This form of entertainment was new to him and did not seem to be particularly amusing.

[illegible]

[illegible] never smile without the [illegible]

"Not quite," he said. "When he [illegible] he [illegible] that he is the Count of [illegible] the Grand Constable of France. His office may [illegible] me, his lucky star may serve me, and his [illegible] tongue may help to avenge me on a certain [illegible] maid, who disdained me. Send me here Olivier, [illegible]."

Tristan bowed gravely and turned on his heel. In his heart he was inclined to a kind of contempt for his monarch's humours. When there was a chance of bringing a man, it seemed to him a waste of time to play the fool in this fashion. The cat and mouse policy was never Tristan's way. He was ever for the sharp way with the rat.

Louis resumed his restless walk with his hands behind clasped him and his head thrust forward as he [illegible] scanning the ground for some lost object, [illegible] was busy revolving many thoughts. He [illegible] very well how precarious his position was, [illegible] he was with his people, how strong [illegible] that the Duke of Burgundy and [illegible] Armagnacs, how little he could count upon [illegible] of the people of Paris if once the [illegible] he was in fear whether the [illegible]

the capital city. He was very ambitious, he was very confident, he was very brave, and yet he felt that ambition, confidence and courage were not enough at that crisis to give his throne support. The superstitious side of his nature turned restlessly to the unknown and his spirit dived into crystals or soared among the spinning planets, struggling for occult enlightenment. To the superstitious, trifles are the giants of destiny, and the king's escapade of the previous evening had taken a firm hold on his fancy. The picturesque blackguard who had mouthed so gallantly his desire to reign over France and save her would in any case have tickled the king's taste for the eccentric, but when the encounter with the poet came upon the heels of the king's strange dream and was followed by the vague prognostications of the star-gazer, the business loomed majestic in his eyes. He had always before his mind the memory of the radiant, saintly maiden who had come like a messenger from heaven to help his father when his father's fortunes seemed to be in the very dust, and it was in all seriousness that he permitted himself to hope and almost to believe that some such succour might be vouchsafed him from the fantastic rhymester who had so lately hectored him in the Fircone Tavern. As the king lifted his eyes

[illegible] conspicuous [illegible]
[illegible] through the [illegible]
A very beautiful girl, tall, [illegible]
coming down one of the [illegible]
of the great crimson blossoms. If the king had [illegible]
a scholar in the learning of the Greeks he would [illegible]
compared the girl to some one of the goddesses [illegible]
dames of the Hellenic Pantheon. As it was, he [illegible]
merely swore in a dazed way that the girl was [illegible]
beautiful, that her beauty appealed to him [illegible]
keenly, and stirred in him a keen [illegible]
[illegible] at his slighted homage. [illegible]
[illegible] d'Amigny wanted to [illegible]
[illegible] the king covered, this girl whom the [illegible]
[illegible] what part would she play in the [illegible]
[illegible] beauty which had gradually [illegible]
[illegible] disturbed mind of Louis? [illegible]
[illegible] saw the king and divined the [illegible]

[illegible] you [illegible] girl?" Louis [illegible]
[illegible] "[illegible]
[illegible]"
[illegible]

brushed the girl's flower face with it and surveyed her mockingly.

"You are a pretty child," he said. "You might have had a king's love. Well, well, you were a fool. Does not Thibaut d'Aussigny woo you?"

"He professes to love me, sire, and I profess to hate him."

"He was sorely wounded last night in a tavern scuffle."

The girl gave a little cry of disappointment.

"Only wounded, sire?"

The king laughed heartily.

"Your solicitude is adorable. Be of cheer. He may recover. And we have clapped hands on his assassin. He shall pay the penalty."

Katherine drew a little nearer to the king. Her eyes were very eager, and there was eagerness in the tones of her voice.

"Sire, I bear this man no malice for hurting Thibaut d'Aussigny."

"You are clemency itself. It would never do to have a woman on the throne. But to hurt a great lord is to hurt the whole body politic. He shall swing for it."

The girl frowned slightly.

"This man should not die, sire. Thibaut was a traitor, a villain——"

[illegible]

his speech.

"Take care, sweeting, lest you [illegible] depth. But you women are fantastic as [illegible] If this knave's life interests you, plead for it to my lord the Grand Constable."

The girl made a gesture of despair.

"Thibaut is pitiless," she said. Her mouth hardened as she thought of the man she hated [illegible] her own failure to thrust him from her path, but it softened again on the next words of the king.

"Thibaut is no longer in office. Try your charm with his successor."

She leaned forward beseechingly.

"His name, sire?"

Louis looked at her thoughtfully.

"He is the Count of Montcorbier," he said. "He is a stranger in our court, but he has found a lodging in my heart. He came under safe conduct from the south last night. He is recommended to me highly by our brother of Provence. I believe he will serve me well, and I am sure he will always [illegible] to loyalness."

The king smiled affably as the ready lies slipped [illegible] his lips. He was amusing himself [illegible] the threads of the fairy tale he was

"You shall have audience with him." The king paused. He caught sight on the steps of the dark familiar figure of the royal barber, who was approaching him deferentially. He called to him:

"Olivier, by and by, when my Lord of Montcorbier takes the air in the garden, bring this lady to him. You understand?"

He turned to Katherine again and once more tickled her chin with the swaying rose.

"Now, go, girl, or my wife and your queen will be wanting her roses."

Katherine again saluted the king and went slowly up the steps into the palace. Louis watched her as she went, watched her until she was out of sight, and then turned sharply upon his servant.

"Well, goodman barber, what of François Villon?"

"A pot of drugged wine last night sent him to sleep in a prison. This morning he woke in a palace, lapped in the linen of a royal bed. He has been washed and barbered, sumptuously dressed and rarely perfumed. He is so changed that his dearest friend would not know him again. He does not seem to know himself. He carries himself as if he had been a courtier all his days."

The king chuckled.

[illegible] the lion's skin he thought himself the lion. Was he not amazed?"

"Too much amazed, sire, to betray amazement. His attendants assure him, with the gravest faces, that he is the Grand Constable of France. I believe he thinks himself in a dream, and, finding the dream delicate, accepts it."

"Remember," said Louis, "to keep to the tale. This fellow came here from Provence last night. None must know who he is save you and I and Tristan. Blow it about to all the court that he is the Count of Montcorbier, the favourite of our brother of Provence, and now my friend and comrade. I have a liking for you, Olivier, as you know, and Tristan and I are very good friends, but neither of your heads are safe on their shoulders if this [illegible] be spoiled by indiscretions."

[illegible] bowed deeply.

"[illegible] for Tristan, sire," he said, "[illegible] myself. The Grand [illegible]

ascended the steps into the palace. The king sniffed pensively at the rose which Katherine had given to him. The perfume seemed to sooth him and he mused, sunning himself and feeding his fancy with the entertainment which playing with the lives of others always afforded to him.

"This Jack and Jill shall dance to my whimsy like dolls upon a wire. It would be rare sport if Mistress Katherine disdained Louis to decline upon this beggar. He shall hang for mocking me. But he carried himself like a king for all his tatters and patches, and he shall taste of splendour."

Glancing up at the terrace he perceived the returning figure of Olivier le Dain, and guessed that his henchman was serving as herald to the new Grand Constable. Behind Olivier came a little cluster of pages, and behind them again the king could see a shining figure in cloth of gold.

"Here comes my mountebank," he said to himself, "as pompous as if he were born to the purple." He moved swiftly to the door of the tower and entered it, disappearing as the little procession descended the steps into the Rose Garden. There was a little grating in the door of the tower, a little grating with a sliding shutter, and through this grating the king now peered with infinite

[illegible] Villon had been greatly changed. The [illegible] own handiwork had so cleansed and [illegible] gentleman, had so trimmed and readjusted his [illegible] that his face now shone as different from the face of the tavern-haunter as the face of the moon [illegible] from the face of a lantern. He was so [illegible] attired as if he were a prince of the [illegible] royal; the noonday sun seemed to take fresh [illegible] from his suit of cloth of gold, the air to be [illegible] by his perfume, the world to be vastly the [illegible] for his furs and jewels. Though it was plain [illegible] the tricked-out poet was in a desperate dilemma [illegible] managed to bear himself with a dignity that [illegible] royally with his pomp. Olivier bowed [illegible] the figure in cloth of gold.

"[illegible] your dignity deign to linger awhile in this [illegible]?" he asked.

[illegible] gentleman in cloth of gold looked at him in [illegible] In truth, the gentleman in cloth of gold [illegible] bewildered frame of mind. He had [illegible] a clean and smooth-shaven face in the [illegible] trimmed hair, and he tried to [illegible] the mirror with his own [illegible]

eyed the splendid clothes that covered him and his memory fumbled in perplexity over the horrors of a dingy, filthy wardrobe, ragged, wine-stained and ancient. He looked at the solemn pages who stood about him with golden cups and golden flagons in their hands, and he tried to remember how he had escaped from the society of Master Robin Turgis into this gilded environment. His head ached with the endeavour and he abandoned it. Olivier repeated his question, and at last Villon found words, though his voice sounded strange and hollow on his ears, and hard to command.

"My dignity will deign to do anything you suggest, good master Blackamoor," he answered, but to his heart he whispered that it was better to humour these strange satellites whose persons he found it impossible to reconcile with any memories of the real world as he knew it. The barber bowed deferentially.

"I shall have to trouble you presently with certain small cares of state," he said.

Villon beamed on him benignly. He was wondering what his interlocutor was talking about, but he felt that it was the course of the wise man to betray no wonder. The conditions were, indeed, bewildering, but also they were not disagreeable, and it was as well to take them cheerfully.

[illegible] are pleasures to your eyes [illegible]
[illegible] bowed anew.

[illegible] majesty will probably honour you with his [illegible] later."

[illegible] beamed again, and again his wonder found [illegible] which seemed to him to make the most and [illegible] of the situation. Perhaps in this singular [illegible] of dreams he was the king's man and the [illegible] friend. At least it could do no harm to as[illegible] such friendship when his solemn companion [illegible] to take it for granted.

[illegible] delighted to see dear Louis. He and I [illegible] good friends. People say hard things of [illegible] believe me, they don't know him."

[illegible] trying his best to piece together the fragments of his memory and to explain to [illegible] it came to pass that he was on terms of [illegible] the king. His head was dizzy and [illegible] like a man in a dark room who

dally as he noted that the pages had placed their golden cups and flagons on the marble table and that his instinct assured him that these precious vessels sheltered no less precious wine.

"You may, you may," he assented, and then as the barber made to depart, Villon's mood changed and he caught him by the sleeve and drew him confidentially toward him.

"Stay one moment," he murmured. "You know this plaguy memory of mine—what a forgetful fellow I am. Would you mind telling me again who I happen to be?"

No look of surprise stirred the barber's face; there came no change in his extreme complaisance.

"You are the Count of Montcorbier, monseigneur," he answered, gravely. "You have just arrived in Paris from the Court of Provence, where you stood in high favour with the king of that country, but your favour is, I believe, greater with the King of France, for he has been pleased to make you Grand Constable. It is his majesty's wish that you contrive to remember this."

Villon laughed a laugh which he tried hard to make hearty and natural, but with indifferent success.

"Of course, it was most foolish of me to forget.

[illegible] greater than [illegible] a great deal of [illegible] authority, and what not?"

[illegible] the king's favour, you are the first man to [illegible]."

[illegible] gave a gasp of gratification. The dream [illegible] in glory.

[illegible] so. And does my exalted position carry [illegible] any agreeable perquisite in the way of [illegible] money?"

[illegible] will dip your finger in your pouch—" [illegible] suggested, pointing a thin forefinger at Vil- [illegible] belt.

[illegible] thrust his fingers into the pocket that hung [illegible] and brought them out again loaded with [illegible] coins, bright and clear from the mint, [illegible] joyously in the sunlight. He gave a [illegible] laugh as he let them run in a shining [illegible] hollowed hand to hollowed hand, and [illegible] their jingle and glitter with the [illegible]

a handful of these broad pieces to the Church of the Celestins and inquire of the beadle there for the dwelling of Mother Villon, a poor old woman, sorely plagued with a scapegrace son? Let him seek her out—she dwells in the seventh story and therefore the nearer to the Heaven she deserves—and give her these coins that she may buy herself food, clothes and firing."

He was too confused to reason clearly with his situation, but he felt sure that whoever he was and wherever he was in this amazing dream of his, the poor old woman whom he loved so well must needs be in it and might benefit by this gift of fairy gold.

Olivier bowed deferentially.

"It shall be done," he said, transferring the great gold discs to his own pocket. Then pointing to a small golden bell which one of the pages had placed upon the table, he added, "If there be anything your dignity should desire, he has only to strike upon this bell."

"You are very good," Villon responded solemnly, and on the phrase Olivier and the pages withdrew into the palace with every sign of the most profound respect. The king at his peep-hole was pleased to observe that his commands were being obeyed most strictly and that no hint of any secret mirth, no

[illegible] the [illegible] gravity of the [illegible] [illegible] and the pages had to play.

[illegible] as Villon found himself alone he looked [illegible] around him, comprehending in his [illegible] glance the grey walls of the palace, the [illegible]-terrace, the petal-strewn steps, the old, [illegible] with its ominous sun dial, and the [illegible] wonderful roses all about him, making the [illegible] paradise of exquisite colours and exquisite [illegible]. He shut his eyes for a few seconds and then [illegible] them sharply as if expecting to find that the [illegible] vanished shadow-like into thin impalpable [illegible] castle and terrace, tower and roses remained [illegible] been, very plain to the poet's astonished [illegible] tiptoeing cautiously across the grass, he [illegible] marble seat which stood beneath a bower [illegible] seemed to be protected by a great [illegible] of the god Pan, which had been given [illegible] by an Eastern prince who had [illegible]

recall the sullen faces of unfriendly gaolers. One of these gaolers he remembered had thrust a mug of wine into his hand and bade him drink surlily, and he had drunk greedily, as was his way when free drink was offered to him, and drinking, drank oblivion sudden and complete.

But why he had gone to a dungeon? His senses ached as he asked himself this, and faint pictures began to piece themselves together out of the episodes of the dead night. He saw again the squalid walls of the Fircone Tavern and his mind jumped back to his recitation of the ballad and his fierce sense of indignation at the humiliation of Paris, girdled by a wall of hostile Burgundians and governed by an impotent king. Then came the vision of an angel's visit and a prayer that had more of devil than angel in it, and then came a quarrel, and a fight in darkness shattered by the flaming torches of the watch and Thibaut's huge body lying on the ground a huddled heap of shining armour. He remembered the ribbon that had been flung to him from the gallery and thrust his hand into the bosom of his vest of cloth of gold and found the token there, its glossiness of white and gold soiled by its touch of the floor. Then came his capture, his contumelious march through the gloomy streets,

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible] consciousness was that he was lying on [illegible] bed instead of on a truss of straw, and that [illegible] darkness about him was not the darkness of the [illegible] Suddenly someone drew a curtain and in a [illegible] the place where he lay filled with a soft light [illegible] served that to Villon which astonished him [illegible] as if the gates of Paradise had parted be[illegible] and shown him the shining lines of the [illegible] Heaven. He remembered that he was lying [illegible] bed, nestled in snowy linen beneath a [illegible] of crimson silk. He remembered that the [illegible] in a gorgeous room, heavy with magnifi[illegible] and roofed with a carved and painted [illegible] glittered with gilt and stars. Curtains [illegible] admitted the daylight through win[illegible] [illegible] gilded hangings glowed in the [illegible]

sweet linen and furred raiment and jewels, and all the ceremonials for the transfiguration of a ragged robin into the likeness of a mighty lord. On the top of all this preparation rose the sun of a splendid banquet, served in ware of gold and silver and waited on by the same obsequious figure in black and the same respectful pages. Then followed the summons to walk into the air, the procession through quiet corridors on to the cool grey terrace and the final installment in the scented solitude of the rose garden. Villon was head-sick and heart-sick with the effort to put so much of the past together. He felt as if in some strange titanic way he had ruined a world and was suddenly called upon by Providence to piece the fragments together and make all whole again. He tapped his forehead wonderingly.

"Last night I was a red-handed outlaw, sleeping on the straw of a dungeon. To-day I wake in a royal bed and my varlets call me monseigneur. There are but three ways of explaining this singular situation. Either I am drunk or I am mad or I am dreaming. If I am drunk, I shall never distinguish Bordeaux wine from Burgundy—a melancholy dilemma. Let's test it."

The marble table stood but a little way from him.

[illegible] and told him that one was wine of Burgundy. He rose and [illegible] across the soft grass to the table and lifted one of the golden dagons gingerly, sniffed at it deeply and poured some of its contents carefully into a golden goblet. Lifting it cautiously to his lips, he drained it judiciously. A ripe, warm, royal flavor [illegible] him.

"By Heaven!" he cried; "no nobler juice ever [illegible] from Burgundian vineyards."

He [illegible] the cup and set it down to fill another [illegible] companion vessel and to repeat the ceremony—sniffing, tasting and swallowing. Again [illegible] his palate was pleased and pacified. [illegible] he sipped and swallowed.

[illegible] of crushed violets ripened [illegible]

everything since then has been and is a dream. The coming of Katherine, a dream. My fight with Thibaut d'Aussigny, a dream. Then the king—popping up at the last moment, like a Jack-in-the-Box—a dream. These clothes, these servants, this garden—dreams, dreams, dreams. I shall wake presently and be devilish cold and devilish hungry, and devilish shabby. But in the meantime, these dream liquors make good drinking."

He was about to fill himself another cup when a shadow fell at his feet, the shadow of Olivier le Dain standing before him with his air of emphasized respect, which was beginning to pall upon the transfigured poet.

"Your dignity will forgive me, but it is the king's wish you should pass judgment on certain prisoners."

Villon stared at him.

"I? And here?"

"Such is the king's pleasure."

"What prisoners?"

"Certain rogues and vagabonds, mankind and womankind, taken brawling in the Fircone Tavern last night."

Villon stroked his chin thoughtfully. An idea seemed to take command of his confused mind.

[illegible] something [illegible]
[illegible] at the core of all this mystery of [illegible]
[illegible] raiment. He leaned forward curiously and
almost whispered to the attendant barber,

"Tell me, is Master François Villon, Master of Arts, rhymer at his best, vagabond at his worst, [illegible]-do-well at all seasons, and scapegrace in all [illegible], among them?"

Olivier smiled complacently as those in office are accustomed to smile at the humours of great men.

"Your dignity is pleased to jest. Shall I send you [illegible]?" Villon caught at the offer sharply.

"[illegible] do with them as I wish?"

"[illegible]tely as you wish. Such is the king's [illegible]"

[illegible] back in resigned surrender to an [illegible]. He had dreamed strange [illegible] and [illegible] but never a [illegible]

"Oh, my poor head," he moaned. "Am I awake? Am I asleep? What an embroglio!"

A sense of dislike to his respectful attendant surged up through his perplexity. "That damned fellow in black is confoundedly obsequious," he muttered. "I wonder if I could order him to be hanged; he has a hanging face."

Even as this kind reflection came into his head, his meditations were disturbed by the tramp of many feet and the rattle and clank of weapons, and a small company of soldiers came wheeling round into the rose garden from the side of the palace, guarding a number of men and women, in whom Villon instantly recognized his familiar friends of the Fircone Tavern. At the head of the soldiers marched a dapper gentleman, courtier-soldier or soldier-courtier, a thing of silk and steel, half dandy, half man-at-arms, exquisitely attired and flagrantly aware of his own attractions. He, too, was familiar to the poet, for he was no other than the pink and white gentleman whom he had seen acting as escort to Katherine on the day when he first beheld her, and whose name, as he had learned on the previous evening from Katherine's own lips, was Noel le Jolys.

"The puppet who dangles after my lady," he grumbled to himself. "He jars the dream."

[illegible] and profoundly hostile to the [illegible] gentlemen. His friends looked so [illegible] wobegone, so bedraggled, while their [illegible] so point-device and self-satisfied that Villon [illegible] a fierce indignation burn within him over the [illegible] of the world.

"How hang-dog my poor devils look and how [illegible]," he thought to himself, as the soldiers ranged [illegible] prisoners in a line before him at the base of [illegible], and their prinked and fragrant captain [illegible] trippingly forward and saluted Villon, pre[illegible] to him at the same time a piece of paper, [illegible] with writing.

"[illegible] lord," he said, dapperly, "here are the names [illegible] night birds."

[illegible] took the paper and looked straightly into [illegible] man's eyes.

"[illegible] we ever met before?" he asked.

[illegible] made a deprecatory gesture.

[illegible] he said, "Your lordship has swept [illegible] interested corner. You shall tell

the same rose from this garden, which of us would win?"

The affable fribble's intelligence appeared to be baffled.

"I do not understand you," he protested.

Villon shrugged his shoulders. "Never mind," he said, seating himself again on the marble seat and looking at the familiar names on the piece of paper.

"Send me hither René de Montigny."

He was fairly convinced by this time that he was not wandering in the labyrinths of a dream, that he really was awake, but that for some reason which he was unable to fathom, he had been thus strangely transmuted into the semblance of splendour and authority.

"The popinjay fails to recognize me," he said to himself; "so may my bullies," and as he thought, René de Montigny was pushed forward by a couple of soldiers and stood sullenly defiant before him.

Villon leaned forward, oddly interested in the grotesque turn of things which put him in this position with his old companion and fellow-scamp.

"You are—" he questioned.

Montigny answered angrily,

"René de Montigny, of gentle blood, fallen on ungentle days."

[illegible] through we fault [illegible] [illegible] but, I thank my stars, I am honest." [illegible] which was made aloud for the benefit [illegible] sundry, provoked a roar of laughter from [illegible] which was promptly converted into a [illegible] indignant soldier smote him into silence [illegible] blow on the back. Villon caught him [illegible] assertion.

[illegible] when, sir? Since last night?"

[illegible] understand your grace."

[illegible] Jason was a farmer in Colchis he sowed [illegible] and reaped soldiers. What do you [illegible] mean, Sire de Montigny?"

[illegible] a little start of surprise but his [illegible] prompt.

[illegible]

[illegible] his head. "Arrows, Master René, [illegible] most condemnable vegetables. [illegible] gentlest crop and may poison [illegible]

[illegible]antly. But there was no recognition in Montigny's eyes. He could see nothing in common between the splendid gentleman who now addressed him and the ragged rhymester who shared so many squalid adventures with him, and in an instant he averted his head respectfully.

"If your grace will deign," he pleaded, stretching out his hands in entreaty, but Villon was inexorable.

"Stand aside," he repeated, and Montigny protesting was dragged back to his place with his fellows while Villon read the name of the next rogue on the list, which happened to be that of Guy Tabarie.

By this time Villon's spirit had entered into a very complete appreciation of the humours of the situation. Having realized that his identity was safe even from the keen eyes of René de Montigny, he felt assured that he might defy the indifferent scrutiny of his less alert companions. And though he made use of the long pendant fold of his cap to conceal in some measure his countenance, he was now so confident of his safety that he was prepared to greet each prisoner with composure.

Guy Tabarie cut a piteous figure as he tottered across the grass, rudely propelled by the violence of the soldier who escorted him tweaking him by the ear, and fell, a quaking mountain of flesh, at the fe[illegible]

[illegible] grovel[illegible] [illegible]
[illegible] red, gross man knelt [illegible]
[illegible] plead for mercy. Villon eyed him
[illegible] he found it hard to restrain his

[illegible] with clean hands?" he asked, and Guy,
[illegible] babbling, his words tumbling from him,
[illegible] and confused, holding out his huge paws
[illegible] schoolboy reproved for want of soap and

[illegible] a lad, my lord, as ever kept body and
[illegible] by walking on the straight and nar-
[illegible] that leads to—"
[illegible] stuttered thus far when Villon interrupted

[illegible]llows, Master Tabarie."
[illegible] quivered in piteous negation.
[illegible] have the fear of God in me as strong
[illegible] Paris."
[illegible] a little nearer to his victim and
[illegible]

in itself a flagrant confession of shameful knowledge. Villon wagged his head wisely.

"Master Tabarie, Master Tabarie, your memory is failing you. Why, no later than the middle of March last you broke into the church at dead of night and pilfered the gold plate from the altar. The fear of God is not very strong in you."

If Master Tabarie had been listening to the words of a wizard, he could not have been more astonished.

"Saints and angels!" he cried aloud. "This Grand Constable is the devil himself! My lord, I was led astray; my lord, I was not alone——"

Villon had had enough entertainment from his fat companion.

He made a sign, and instantly a soldier swooped upon the grovelling figure, twitched him to his feet and drew him apart, stuttering furious protestations of innocence.

Villon looked at the list in his hand, and this time he called for two names, "Colin de Cayeulx and Casin Cholet," and as he spoke, the two knavès were pushed forward towards him. Villon drew the pair a little way apart and stood between them, eyeing their roguish faces on which false affability struggled with a very real fear.

"Are you good citizens, sirs?" he asked, and Colin immediately answered him:

[illegible] my own poverty, [illegible]
[illegible] my friend here. The king [illegible]
[illegible], and Paris no more peaceable bourgeois
[illegible] Cholet."

[illegible] he waved Cousin Cholet a warm salu-
[illegible] Cholet responded to his praises with a
[illegible] and yet more friendly words:

"[illegible] any poor merits, I owe them all to this
[illegible]'s example. I have followed his lead,
[illegible] and humble. 'Keep your eye on Colin de
[illegible]' I have ever said to myself, 'and learn how
[illegible] lives.'"

[illegible] men leered at each other across Villon,
[illegible] their praises of each other might have
[illegible] upon the great lord who seemed so conde-
[illegible]. Villon smiled.

[illegible] the Castor and Pollux of purity? [illegible]
[illegible] the night of last Shrove Tuesday [illegible]
[illegible] all to Pot Mengin's [illegible]

"That was Colin's adventure!"

"That was Casin's enterprise!"

"I deplored it."

"I had no hand in it."

Forgetting their respect for authority in the fury of their antagonism, they struck angrily at each other across their questioner and were for grappling in close combat when Villon made a signal and they, in their turn, were dragged back raging into the ranks of their fellow prisoners.

There was only one left now—Jehan le Loup—who stood with folded arms and lowering brows, surveying the efforts of his comrades. Villon made a sign, and the man was dragged into his presence. Villon clapped him on the shoulder.

"You seem a brisk, assured fellow for a man in duress."

The friendly demeanour of the great man cheered the prisoner and he answered bluffly:

"My good conscience sustains me."

Villon's demeanour was still amicable as he put his next question in a voice that came only to Jehan's ears.

"I am glad to hear it. How did Thevenin Pensete come to his death?"

The muscles of Jehan le Loup's face twitched for

[illegible] himself and answered with a [illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible] should I know, my lord?"

[illegible] drew him nearer and spoke lower still. [illegible] better? That nasty quarrel over the cards, [illegible] words and a snatch for the winnings, a [illegible] table, an extinguished taper, a stab in the [illegible] and a groan. Exit Thevenin Pensete. Your [illegible] doesn't grow rusty!"

[illegible]'s grey face grew greyer and uglier, but he [illegible] countenance.

[illegible]seigneur," he answered, "I loved him like a [illegible]

[illegible] loved Abel," Villon said. He made a [illegible] Jehan le Loup was taken back to his [illegible]

[illegible] had been [illegible] directed. He [illegible]

The fop's face lengthened with amazed disappro-bation.

"Gentlewomen, messire? Those four doxies?"

Villon reproved him.

"They are women, good captain, and you and I are gentlemen, or should be, and must use them gently."

Messire Noel frowned and his hand made a gesture in the direction of his sword-hilt; then he remembered the folly of quarrelling with so great a man, and contented himself with shrugging his shoulders as he questioned,

"And the demirep in the doublet and hose?"

"Let her stay for the present," Villon answered, and in obedience to a sign from Noel the four girls came timidly forward with downcast eyes, while Huguette remained apart, leaning composedly against the image of Pan and surveying the scene with a good-humoured indifference.

When the girls were close to him, Villon spoke:

"Well, young ladies, what is this trade of yours that has brought you into trouble?"

Jehanneton dropped a curtsey.

"I make the caps that line helmets."

Isabeau followed quickly,

"I am a lace weaver. Enné, an honest trade."

"Or a glover, perhaps."

Dorothée ended the exclamation.

"And I a glover."

Mischief danced in Villon's eyes.

"No worse and no better. A word in your ear!" He whispered something into each girl's ear in turn; and as he did so, each girl started, drew back, looked confused, laughed and blushed.

It is ever to be deplored that the worthy Dom Gregory, whose ecclesiastical history of Poitou is the source of so much curious information concerning Villon, should have omitted, from a mistaken sense of delicacy, to chronicle precisely what it was that the poet whispered in the ears of each of the girls. All he condescends to record in his crabbed canine Latin, is that Villon showed such intimate acquaintance with certain physical peculiarities or whimsical adventures private to each damsel that she believed the speaker's knowledge to be little less than supernatural. Literature of the skittish sort [illegible] the monastic reticence, but history can [illegible] and leave imagination in [illegible]

"The gentleman is a wizard. Why, he told me——"

"Enné, a miracle; he reminded me——"

"Why, he knows——"

"What do you think he said?"

Each girl was whispering to the other what Villon had told her, when Villon interrupted them.

"Young women, young women, the world is a devil of a place for those who are poor. I could preach you a powerful sermon on your follies and frailties, but, somehow, the words stick in my gullet. Here is a gold coin apiece for you. Go and gather yourself roses, my roses, to take back to what, Heaven pity you! you call your homes."

Jehanneton gave a little gasp of surprise.

"Are we free?"

Villon answered her sadly,

"Free? Poor children! Such as you are never free. Go and pray Heaven to make men better, for the sake of your daughter's daughters."

His extended hands were full of gold pieces, but they were soon emptied by the eager girls who pounced upon them. Then they left him with many curtsies and salutations and drifted away delightedly into the mazes of the rose garden.

Villon turned to look at the men prisoners, who were anxiously scanning his actions.

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countenance.

Grand Constable!"

constable."

away.

said, "and if you can, mend

advanced to where Huguette was standing, with a smile of scornful indifference still on her fair face.

Villon asked himself as he went:

"Why, in God's name, does the world appear so different to-day? Is it the thing they call the better self, or merely this purple and fine linen?"

What he said when he came to the girl was,

"Fair mistress, you have a comely face and you make it very plain that you have a comely figure. Why do you go thus?"

The girl shrugged her green shoulders and shifted the balance of her body from one green leg to the other, as she answered impudently,

"For ease and freedom, to please myself, and to show my fine shape to please others."

Last night this girl had been his own familiar friend; to-day she lay leagues away from his fairy greatness. There was pity in his next speech.

"Are you a happy woman, mistress?"

"Happy enough," she answered as she snapped her fingers defiantly, "when fools like you don't clap me into prison for living my life in my own way."

"I may be a fool, but I did not clap you into prison. Heaven forbid!"

A curious look came into the girl's eyes, and she drew a little nearer to him. Her voice was a

[illegible] the beauty of her [illegible] supple curve of her [illegible] body [illegible] seemed to coax him, cat-like, as she whispered:

"Your voice sounds familiar, Monseigneur. Was I ever the honour to serve you?"

Villon drew away from her. He felt suddenly body-sick and soul-sick; sorry for the woman, sorry for himself.

"Who knows?" he answered. The girl laughed and turned aside.

"Who cares? What are you going to do with me?"

"Set you free, my delicate bird of prey. These wild wings were never meant for clipping and caging. Is there anything I can do to please you?"

On the instant her enticement shifted; all her being was a tremulous entreaty.

"What has come to Master François Villon?"

"Why do you ask?"

"He was with us when we were snared last night. But he did not share our prison and he is not with us now. Does he live?"

Villon hesitated for a moment before speaking.

"He lives. He is banished from Paris, but he lives."

[illegible] clasped her hands in gratitude.

"The sweet saints be thanked!" she said; and there was that in her voice which made the simple words sound very sincere to Villon's ears.

"What do you care for the fate of this fellow?"

"As I am a fool, I believe I love him."

"Heaven's mercy! Why?"

"I cannot tell you, Messire. A look in his eyes, a trick of his voice—the something—the nothing that makes a woman's heart run like wax in the fire. He never made woman happy yet, and I'll swear no woman ever made him happy. If you gave him the moon, he would want the stars for a garnish. He believes nothing; he laughs at everything; he is a false monkey—and yet, I wish I had borne such a child."

There was a sudden pain at Villon's heart, as if the girl's fingers had seized it and squeezed it, but he replied lightly:

"Let us speak no more of this rascal. He believes more and laughs less than he did. He is so glad to be alive that his forehead scrapes the sky and the stars fall at his feet in gold dust. Paris is well rid of such a jackanapes."

"You are a merry gentleman."

"I would be more gentle than merry with you. Will you wear this ring for my sake? Fancy that

[illegible] from [illegible] [illegible] ways think kindly of your wild eyes."

"Let me see your face," she requested, but [illegible] denied her. He signed to Noel le Jolys, who [illegible] stood apart, and the young soldier came [illegible] to him.

"Captain," he said, "give this lady honourable conduct."

He moved away and left the pair together—the mannish woman and the womanish man, looking at each other, the man in admiration and the woman in veiled disdain.

"You are a comely girl," Noel affirmed [illegible].

Huguette laughed.

"This is news from no-man's land."

Noel spoke lower.

"Where do you lodge?"

Huguette was a woman of business in an [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

"Heaven forgive me, I am becoming a most pitiful loud preacher. Every rogue there deserves the gallows, but so do I, no less, and I have not swallowed enough of this court air to make me a hypocrite. Well, all this justice is thirsty work, and, mad or sane, sleeping or waking, let me drink while I can."

He returned to the golden flagons, poured out a full cup of Burgundy, watched it glow in the sunlight, and lifted it to his lips.

"To the loveliest lady this side of heaven!" he said for a toast, but ere he touched his lips to the cup, he lowered it again.

Olivier le Dain had come on to the terrace, and with Olivier there came a lady.

"By heaven," Villon cried, "my eyes dazzle, for I believe I see her!"

CHAPTER VI

GARDEN LOVE

On the terrace the fair girl leaned and looked down on the garden and its golden occupant. To the eyes of Villon her beauty had never seemed rarer, and the wild passion which had prompted him to spin his very soul into song burnt with a new, delicious strength of hope. He stared at her as a worshipper might stare at some sudden vision of a long dreamed of goddess, and as he stared, Olivier descended the steps, soft-footed, and came and stood before him.

"My lord, there is a lady there who desires to speak with you."

Villon turned his gaze unwillingly from the gracious apparition above him to the sombre servitor.

"I desire to speak with her," he said earnestly, and again his eyes travelled in the direction of the

[illegible] drew close to him and touched him re-
[illegible]

this as if it were written in letters of gold upon tables of iron. Forget all else. The king commands it."

The words sounded dully enough on Villon's brain, absorbed as he was in the contemplation of his queen, but at least they served to convince him of what he had already begun to assure himself, that for some purpose or other King Louis wished him well and granted him golden chances.

François of Corbeuil, Count of Montcorbier, stood in a very different relation to the Lady Katherine from that of the lowly poet and gaolbird who had rhymed and sighed and battled in the Fircone Tavern last night.

"The king shall be obeyed," he said gravely, and Olivier, turning, made a sign to Katherine, who descended the steps slowly. As she reached the last step, Olivier saluted Villon and the lady profoundly, and, mounting the steps, vanished within the palace.

The man and the woman were left alone in the rose garden. Villon felt a sudden strange sensation at his heart, exquisite pain and exquisite pleasure, and he clasped his hands together.

"I am awake," he assured himself; "no dream could be as fair as she."

Even at the thought, Katherine flung herself

[illegible] lady gracious to the [illegible]
[illegible] as she knelt to him with uplifted [illegible]
[illegible] hands and eyes.

"[illegible] lord," she cried, "will you listen to a dis-
[illegible] lady?"

[illegible] stooped and caught her white fingers and
[illegible] to her feet.

"[illegible] while the lady kneels," he said gently, and
[illegible] looked with a strange apprehension into the
[illegible], bright eyes of Katherine. Would she know
[illegible] for what he was, he wondered. He read no rec-
[illegible] in her sweet eyes. Katherine returned his
[illegible] unflinchingly regarding him as a great lady
[illegible] regard some stranger her equal of whom she
[illegible] a favour.

"[illegible] not know me," Villon's delight cried
[illegible] and at the thought his spirit fluttered
[illegible]. The Lord of Moncorbier, who
[illegible] of France, might say [illegible]
[illegible] of France

Villon smiled a contented smile.

"Thereby making room for me," he suggested.

Katherine went on unheeding:

"The penalty is death. But Thibaut was a traitor sold to Burgundy."

"Did this Villon fight him for his treason?"

"No. He fought for the sake of a woman. He risked his life with a light heart because a woman asked him."

"How do you know all this?"

"Because I was the woman. This man had seen me, thought he loved me, sent me verses——"

"How insolent!"

"It was insolence—and yet they were beautiful verses. I was in mortal fear of Thibaut d'Aussigny. I went to this Villon and begged him to kill my enemy. He backed his love tale with his sword—and he lies in the shadow of death. It is not just that he should suffer for my sin."

Villon turned suddenly upon the beautiful suppliant. A thought had come into his brain so whimsical and so fantastic that it made him as dizzy for an instant as if the smooth grass beneath him had yawned into a sheer and evil precipice.

"Do you by any chance love this Villon?"

A little wave of disdain rippled over the girl's calm face.

[illegible] and I do not want him to die, though [illegible] life cannot be very dear to him if he would [illegible] it away to please a woman."

She had held a rose in her hand, and as she spoke [illegible] flung it from her in dainty symbolism of the life [illegible] the poor tavern poet had risked so bravely [illegible] her sake. A mad resolve came into Villon's mind. [illegible] was, indeed, all that this woman thought him [illegible] all that those with whom he had spoken had [illegible] him he was, now was his chance to play the [illegible] to his heart's desire. If the Grand Constable [illegible] the power to pardon, surely the Grand Constable [illegible] the right to woo. She had drawn a little [illegible] from him and he followed her up, standing so [illegible] her that with a little movement he might [illegible] her on the cheek.

[illegible] when you are the woman? If I had stood [illegible] shoes, I would have done as he did for

prayer unshackles him and we will do no more than banish him from Paris. Forget that such a slave ever came near you."

The lady dropped him a magnificent curtsey, and her cheeks glowed with gratitude.

"I shall remember your clemency."

She made as if she would leave his presence, but his boldness waxed within him as a fire waxes with new wood, and he caught her lightly by the wrist.

"By Saint Venus, I envy this fellow that he should have won your thoughts. For I am in his case and I, too, would die to serve you!"

Surprise flamed in the girl's eyes, surprise and amusement mingled.

"My lord, you do not know me," she laughed, and her laughter was as fresh and merry as a milkmaid's in the meadows.

"Did he know you? Yet when he saw you he loved you and made bold to tell you so."

Her forehead wrinkled prettily in a little protesting frown.

"His words were of no more account than the wind in the eaves. But you and I are peers and the words we change have meanings."

Villon caught his breath. The Lord of Montcorbier was, indeed, wardered by very different stars

[illegible] of the Phœnix." He [illegible]

[illegible] I be newly come to Paris I have heard [illegible] the beauty and more of the pride of the [illegible] Catherine de Vaucelles."

[illegible] fire burned in the girl's pale cheeks, and [illegible] her head back scornfully.

[illegible] humble enough as to my beauty, but I am [illegible] of my pride."

[illegible] leaning forward with entreating hands, [illegible] with beseeching lips.

[illegible] you pity me if I told you that I loved [illegible]

[illegible] laughed, and the music of her laughter [illegible] faint echoes among the roses as if [illegible] were a magic bell with a fairy hand [illegible]

[illegible] she said. "How [illegible]

[illegible] the girl's laughter brightened the [illegible] air.

"You are very inflammable."

Villon caught at her words.

"My fire burns to the ashes. You can no more stay me from loving you than you can stay the flowers from loving the soft air, or true men from loving honour, or heroes from loving glory. I would rake the moon from heaven for you."

The girl swayed her head daintily, as a queen rose might in a realm of roses. There was something like pity in her eyes, but laughter lingered on her lips.

"That promise has grown rusty since Adam first made it to Eve." She eyed him in silence for a second time, deriding his sighs with a smile: then "There is a rhyme in my mind," she cried, "about moons and lovers," and she began to declaim, half muse, half minx, some lines that had pleased her, to tease the importunate stranger.

"Life is unstable,
  Love may uphold;
Fear goes in sable,
  Courage in gold.
Mystery covers
  Midnight and noon,
Heroes and lovers
  Cry for the moon."

[illegible]

[illegible] had sent her [illegible]

[illegible] him. Sent a [illegible]

half fanned the words and the [illegible]

them, but now they seemed to sound as [illegible]

the married music of all the falling waters [illegible]

the blowing winds of the world. It was a [illegible]

face that he turned to the girl as he heard [illegible]

the thought in his heart:

"What doggerel!"

The girl flashed scorn at him.

"Doggerel! It is dignity," she [illegible]

a line from her disposition in Godspeed, [illegible]

to the hearsed ballad-maker, as she stood [illegible]

further up the steps. Willan followed her. [illegible]

[illegible] bright cheek, he was the maid's [illegible]

[illegible] and would press his suit if he [illegible]

[illegible] "Many day," he said, [illegible]

Villon caught fire from both her moods.

"No more?" he said, and though the sound of his voice jested, the look in his eyes was earnest.

The girl responded to jest and earnest royally.

"No less. Are you not Grand Constable, chief of the king's army? There is an enemy at the gates of Paris, and none of the king's men can frighten him away." She pointed out where, in the distance, beyond the walls of Paris, the pitched tents of the enemy fluttered their hostile flags. Her bosom heaved with great desire. "Oh, that a man would come to court! For the man who shall trail the banners of Burgundy in the dust for the king of France to walk on, I may perhaps have favours."

Villon looked at her as men must have looked at Joan of Arc when she bade them rise up and strike for France.

"You are hard to please," he said, but his heart was full of joy at the thought of trying to please her. If he could do this thing!

The girl answered his words and not his thoughts.

"My hero must have every virtue for his wreath, every courage for his coronet. Farewell."

By this time she had reached the terrace and she made to enter the palace. Villon called to her longingly:

[illegible]

The girl smiled demurely.

"I have but one," she said, "and I have [illegible] long since. Farewell."

Villon made a dash for audacity.

"I will follow you," he said, and he moved to do so, but the girl's lifted finger stayed him.

"You may not," she said peremptorily. "I go to the queen." And so with a swift salutation, gracious as the dip of a dancing wave, she entered the palace and left him standing there, dazed and ardent, as a man might be who had just been vouchsafed the vision of an angel. He murmured to himself [illegible] words as he slowly descended the steps to the ground,

"Oh, that a man would come to court," and on that text he wove the hopeful commentary of his thoughts.

"Why should I not deserve her? Last night I was only a poor devil with a rusty sword and a [illegible] suit. To-day all's different. I am the king's friend, it would seem, a court potentate, a man of [illegible]. What may I not accomplish? This fancy smiles [illegible] the world will warm its hands at [illegible]

Kathérine. He forgot, as lovers always will, to get, that there was any one else in the world but himself and his beloved, and he was so wrapped in his sweet contemplations that he did not hear the tower door gently open, did not hear the soft, creeping footsteps of the king as he came out of his hiding place and shuffled across the soft grass toward his plaything.

CHAPTER VII

THE ANSWER TO BURGUNDY

A TOUCH on the shoulder roused Villon from [illegible] honeyed meditations, and he turned with a [illegible] find the sable figure of the king at his side and [illegible] sinister visage smiling upon him.

"Good afternoon, Lord Constable," Louis [illegible] amiably, and as Villon dropped respectfully on [illegible] knee, he questioned:

"Does power taste well?"

"Nobly, sire. On my knees let me thank [illegible] majesty."

"Nonsense, man; I'm pleasing myself. You [illegible] yourself into splendour. 'If François were the [illegible] of France,' eh?"

Villon rose with voice and gesture of [illegible] entreaty.

"Your majesty will understand——"

Louis [illegible] his apologies [illegible] blandly.

"[illegible] My good friend, you [illegible]

[illegible], a man with a [illegible] France.'"

"Sire, that has been my [illegible] plenty."

Louis clasped his thin arms across his [illegible] hugged himself affectionately.

"Well, I couldn't very well make you [illegible] know, and I wouldn't if I could, for I have a [illegible] for the task myself. But I owed you a good turn [illegible] your own words prompted the payment. 'This [illegible] devil shall taste power,' I said. 'I will make [illegible] my Grand Constable——'"

Villon's joy was so great that he was unable [illegible] hear the king out, but interrupted him with enthusiastic promises.

"Sire, I will serve you as never king was served."

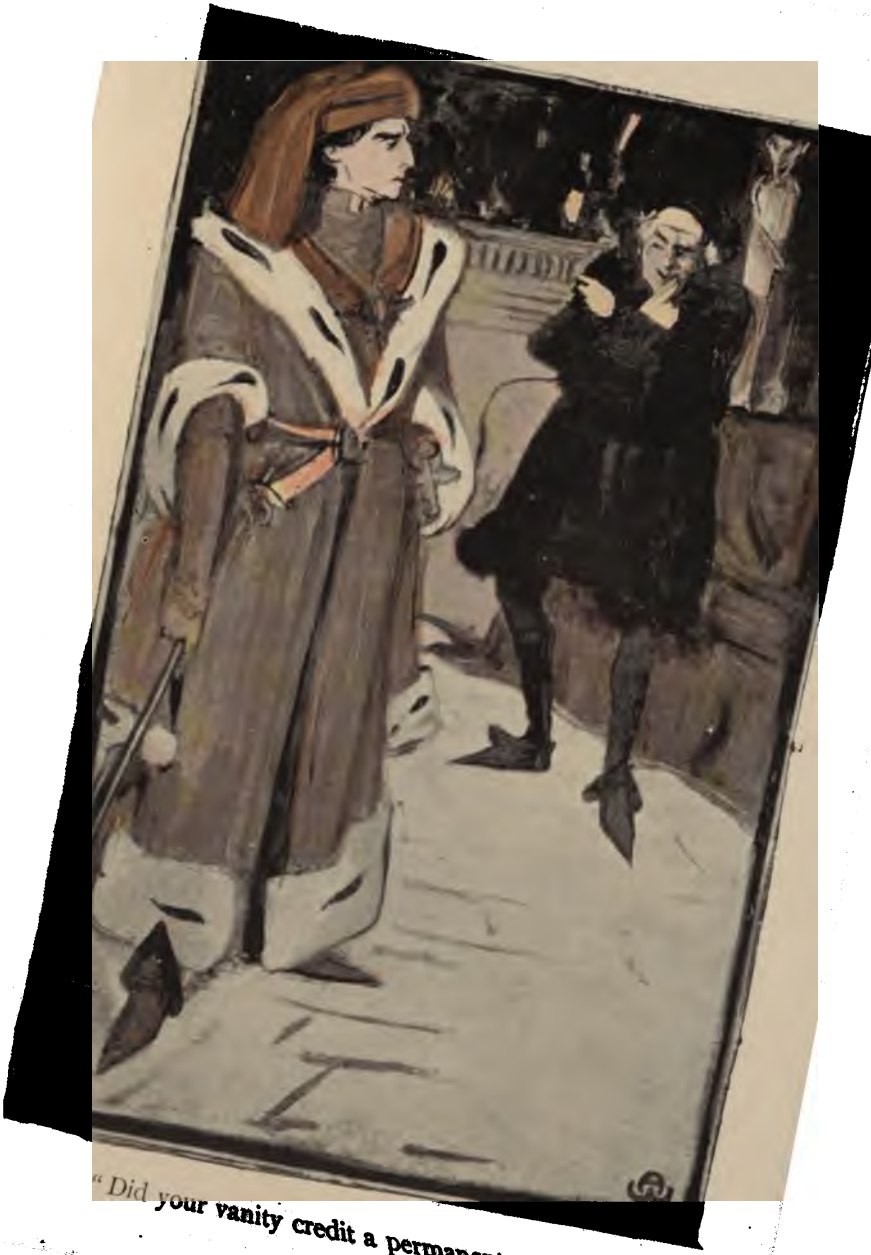
Louis went on unheeding, and his quiet, monotonous words fell on the hot brain of the poet and chilled it.

"I will make him my Grand Constable for a week."

If Louis had jerked a dagger into Villon's side, he could not have more surely hurt his victim.

"A week, sire?" Villon gasped, almost unable to realize the meaning of the king's words.

Louis turned upon him and snarled at him:



"Did your vanity credit a permanent appointment?"

[illegible] Clearly, sweet, that would [illegible] just one day!"

[illegible] moonlight seemed to have gone out of his [illegible] the sweet out of the roses. Villon could [illegible] himself: "A week!" and stare vacant[illegible] the king. The king emphasized his offer, lingering over it lovingly.

"Seven, sir. One wonderful week, seven delirious days." He paused for an instant as he counted. "One hundred and sixty-eight heavenly hours. It's the chance of a lifetime. The world was made in seven days. Seven days of power, seven days of [illegible], seven days of love."

Villon gave a groan of despair for his golden [illegible]

"And then go back to the garret and the kennel, [illegible] and the brothel!"

[illegible] malign smile deepened. He came closer to [illegible] and tapped him on the chest with his lean [illegible]. He was enjoying himself immensely.

"[illegible] exactly," he hummed. "You don't [illegible] of the joke yet. In a week's time, [illegible]

If the world had been colourless and worthless before, it was now no better than a hideous heap of ashes. If Villon had run up a heavy reckoning with the king at the Fircone Tavern, must he wipe out the score with his life-blood? Villon fell at the king's feet with extended hands and agonized, beseeching eyes.

"Sire, sire, have pity!"

The king looked down on him in disdain.

"Are you so fond of life? Are you so poor a thing that you prize your garret and your kennel, your tavern and your brothel so highly?"

Villon bowed his head.

"I was content yesterday."

The king surveyed the cowering figure with growing contempt.

"Can you be content to-day? Please yourself. There is still a door open to you. You can go back to your garret this very moment if you choose. Say the word and my servants shall strip you of your smart feathers and drub you into the street."

Villon buried his face in his hands. "Your majesty, be merciful!" he implored.

The king's scorn blazed out:

"You read Louis of France a lesson, and Louis of France returns the compliment. I took you for

[illegible] your conscience. Make to your choice [illegible] it." But remember that I never change [illegible] word. You may have your week of wonder [illegible] but if you do, by my word as a king, you [illegible] paying for it."

Villon rose to his feet and caught at his throat as if the grip of the rope were at that very moment [illegible] about it. He choked as he spoke:

"In God's name, sire, what have I done that you should torture me thus?"

The king snapped his answer:

"You have mocked a king and maimed a [illegible] You can't get off scot free."

[illegible] bewildered thoughts forced themselves [illegible] He spoke not so much to the king [illegible] desperately trying to decide.

"[illegible] help me! Life, squalid, sordid, but [illegible] corners and its brute pleasures [illegible] and warm sheep, living hawks [illegible]

"Pray, friend, pray, to help your judgment!"

He had taken off his black velvet cap and ran his eye over the little row of metal saints which encircled it as if he were meditating to which particular patron he should recommend his Grand Constable to address himself. As he did so, Olivier le Dain came through the garden and moved swiftly to the king's side.

"Sire," he said, "the Burgundian herald, Toison d'Or, attends under a flag of truce with a message for your majesty."

Louis turned to his barber.

"We will receive him here, Olivier, in this green audience chamber. We need the free air when we hold speech with Burgundy."

As Olivier left the royal presence a little thing happened which meant much to four people. Katherine came on to the terrace with Noel le Jolys. She had a lute in her hand and she touched its chords lightly, seeking to make an air for words as she idled the time with her wooer. Louis saw her, though Villon did not, for he was huddled in a heap on the marble seat with his head in his hands trying to control his whirling thoughts. A new demon of mischief entered the king's heart.

"How," he thought, "if my lady Virtue, who

[illegible]

[illegible] William [illegible]

[illegible] red with agony.

"One further chance, fellow," said the king. "If the Count of Montcorbier win the heart of [illegible] Katherine de Vaucelles within the week, he shall escape the gallows and carry his lady love wherever he pleases."

"On your word of honour, sire?"

"My word is my honour, Master François. Well?"

At this very moment it pleased heaven that Katherine, sitting on the terrace and smiling at the adoration in Noel le Jolys' eyes, seemed to find the [illegible] she sought and began to sing. The tune was [illegible] and plaintive, tender as an ancient lullaby. [illegible] were the words of the tortured poet, and [illegible] them a new hope seemed to come into his

[illegible]

[illegible]

"Well," said the king; "you cried for [illegible] I give it to you."

"And I take it at your hands!" Villon thundered. "Give me my week of wonders though I die a dog's death at the end of it. I will show France and her what lay in the heart of the poor rhymester."

Louis applauded, clapping his thin hands together gleefully.

"Spoken like a man! But remember, a bargain's a bargain. If you fail to win the lady, you must, with heaven's help, keep yourself for the gallows. No self-slaughter, no flinging away your life on some other fool's sword. I give you the moon, but I want my price for it."

Villon's blood now ran warm again in its channels, and he answered stoutly:

"Sire, I will keep my bargain. Give me my week of opportunity, and if I do not make the most of it I shall deserve the death to which you devote me."

Even as he spoke the air was stirred with a cheerful flourish of trumpets and the quiet garden was invaded by Tristan l'Hermite and a company of soldiers, escorting a tall and stately gentleman, whose gorgeous tabard proclaimed him to be Toison d'Or, the herald of the Duke of Burgundy. The news of his coming had run through the palace, and the

[illegible]

[illegible] the king would [illegible]

[illegible] stood [illegible] on the mantle [illegible]

[illegible] of Paris and drew Villon down [illegible]

[illegible] well in this man's words, my Lord [illegible]

[illegible] be whispered, and then turning to the [illegible]

[illegible] figure of the herald, he demanded: "[illegible]

[illegible] message, sir?"

[illegible] advanced a few feet nearer to the [illegible]

[illegible] spoke in a ringing voice.

"[illegible] name of the Duke of Burgundy and of [illegible]

[illegible] brothers-in-arms assembled in [illegible]

[illegible] outside the walls of Paris, I hereby summon [illegible]

[illegible] of France, to surrender this city [illegible]

[illegible] and to yield yourself in confidence to my [illegible]

[illegible]."

[illegible] his hands over his knees and [illegible]

[illegible] like an enquiring bird [illegible]

[illegible] Herald?"

"The angels of great deeds."

Villon had been sitting listening as a man listens in a dream, almost unconscious of what was taking place. Among the ladies on the terrace Katherine stood conspicuous in her youth and beauty, and to her his eyes were turned in worship. The quarrels of great princes, the destinies of France were for the moment indifferent to him. He forgot his high desires of empire, his swelling belief in his real mission. He was only conscious that a great prize lay temptingly within his grasp, that he might win his heart's desire. Louis interrupted his reverie:

"The Count of Montcorbier, Constable of France, is my counsellor. His voice delivers my mind. Speak, friend, and give this messenger his answer."

He touched Villon on the arm and Villon turned to him in astonishment. "As I will, sire?"

The king caught him up impatiently.

"Yes, go on, go on. 'If Villon were the king of France.'"

Villon leaped to his feet and advanced toward the herald. A wild exultation filled his veins with fire. He felt as if he were the lord of the world, as if his hands held the scales that decided the destinies of nations. He had always dreamed of the great deeds he would do, and now great deeds were possible to

[illegible]

"Herald of Burgundy, in God's name [illegible] King's, I bid you go back to your master [illegible] Kings are great in the eyes of their people, [illegible] the people are great in the eyes of God, and [illegible] people of France who answer you in the name of [illegible] sovereign. The people of Paris are not so poor [illegible] spirit that they fear the crook of the Burgundian [illegible] forces. We are well victualled, we are well armed, [illegible] we lie snug and warm behind our stout walls, we laugh at your leaguer. But when we who eat are hungry, when we who drink are dry, when we who [illegible] are frozen, when there is neither bite on the [illegible] nor sup in the pitcher nor spark upon the hearth, our answer to rebellious Burgundy will be [illegible] cannon. You are knocking at our doors, beware [illegible] them and come forth to speak with us [illegible] the gate. We give you back defiance for [illegible] menace blow for blow. This is [illegible] God [illegible]

[illegible] to heaven while Villon [illegible] upon a hundred lips. As Toison d'Or turned and left the presence, Katherine came swiftly down the steps and flung herself at Villon's feet.

"My Lord," she said. "With my lips the women of France thank you for your words of flame."

Louis leaned forward, smiling sardonically.

"Mistress, what does this mean?" he questioned.

The girl rose to her feet, looking into Villon's face with eyes that mirrored the admiration shining in his eyes.

"It means, sire, that a man has come to court!"

A WORD [illegible]

IT is a thousand pities that the materials for [illegible]ing up a practical presentment of the real Rabelais of Master François Villon are so slight, that in the historical sense they might almost be said to have [illegible] existent. We know, indeed, a little of Master François' early days, partly from some confessions which must at all times be interpreted with a liberal sense of humour and glossed with an infinite deal of good nature, and partly from stray records made by those who do not seem to have held the vagrant poet very warm in their hearts. But of his life in the [illegible] of which this chronicle deals, there is [illegible] where there is much to seek.

The silence of Gonnelaye may be explained in a thousand ways, possibly professional jealousy, minister for another, who in no sense [illegible] did as much and as well, possibly [illegible] and fright of the times for it is [illegible] Villon [illegible] his [illegible] [illegible]

Good Master Clement Marot, when he took it upon himself, generations after our poet was dust and ashes, to edit our poet's writings, said much in praise of the singer but said little, no doubt because he knew little, of the poet's life.

And the great creator of Pantagruel and Gargantua, the immeasurable Alcofribias Nasier, whom the world loves or hates as Rabelais, in what he contributed to our knowledge of François Villon has only—to use a weather-worn and moss-grown phrase—made confusion yet worse confounded.

We should be at a deadlock, indeed, if it were not for Poitou and its Abbey of Bonne Aventure, whose library is luckily rich in historical manuscripts of the period, and richest of all in that priceless manuscript of Dom Gregory, which, treating in general of the ecclesiastical history of Poitou in the fifteenth century, dealt so particularly and so liberally with the life of Master François Villon, because Master François Villon in his old age was so excellent a patron of the church. We say dealt advisedly, for time has treated somewhat scurvily the fair skins of parchment upon which the good Dom Gregory recorded his thoughts and his opinions at considerable length as the rich setting of the facts, too few in number, with which he condescended to enlighten

[illegible]

from the roll of his patron saint, [illegible]

and gap in the story is necessary, so that [illegible]

our hero found himself so suddenly and so [illegible]

taken into favour by his king, and so suddenly and

so strangely mulct upon by his minions. We have

indeed some admirable homilies of the worthy

friar's in praise of the conduct and courage of Maître

François Villon at the time of his unexpected

exaltation. 'After a gracious invocation of many

saints and angels, the very clerk of the company of

heaven, Dom Gregory, in a fine spirit of [illegible]

proceeds to applaud the Order of Malfaitours for the

high example he set to his fellow-men.' Thus, to

effect says the worthy churchman, were a pack [illegible]

having passed the flower of his life in opprobrious

manner of ignobilities, still kept in a sense the [illegible]

nest of his soul and allowed the brightness of the

celestial flame to burn, faintly indeed but [illegible]

guttered, on the altar of his heart. How many [illegible]

asks Dom Gregory, glowing with a pious [illegible]

tion, how many men who in humility have [illegible]

that they might [illegible]

[illegible]

themselves in adversity? Master François Villon, he goes on to say, is the loveliest example known to him of a man, who, having always believed in himself with a great belief, did, on being put to the test, prove that his belief was founded, not on the shifting sands of vanity and vain glory, but on the solid granite of good faith and the inestimable doctrines of the church.

From all this we gather dimly, as one discerns objects in a mist, that Master François Villon, as Count of Montcorbier, proved himself to be little less than equal to the high opinion of himself which he had confided all unwittingly into the ear of his masquerading sovereign. But the pages in which Dom Gregory sets forth at length exactly all that Master François Villon did and said and thought during the period of his astonishing probation, are unfortunately lost to the Abbey of Bonne Aventure, and, in consequence, to the world. No less than six folios consecrated by the careful pen of Dom Gregory to this memorable epoch have vanished from the priceless manuscript. The custodian of the Abbey library will tell you with tears in his eyes that these pages disappeared during the storm and stress of the French Revolution, but travellers in France are too well aware of the readiness of ecclesiastical

[illegible]

interpreted by an eloquent tongue fired by a [illegible] mother wit, earned him the ear and won him the heart of the king's great captains and wrung from them at first a reluctant but finally such a delighted adherence as their sires had been compelled to surrender to the Maid of Orleans.

Yet while our poet was playing these two parts, he managed his affairs so dexterously that he seemed to the general eye to be playing but one part, and that the part of the dazzlingly magnificent courtier. If his mornings were given to consultation with the king and the king's chief soldiers, if his forenoons were devoted to the confirming of edicts and the promulgations of laws all tending to alleviate the condition and lighten the load of the people of Paris, his afternoons and evenings and shining summer nights were entirely surrendered to the glittering pleasures and pastimes of a man of ease. We hear of entertainment after entertainment, banquet and ball and masquerade, pageant and play and pastime, each one of which seemed to be the last word of wealthy ingenuity until it was eclipsed by its still more splendid successor. And it was this part of which the Count of Montcorbier chose to make the most with a very special purpose. He caused, it seems, many emissaries of his to quit Paris and find

[illegible]

[illegible] of [illegible] [illegible]

[illegible] of the enemy; namely, that the [illegible]

new favourite was a wastrel and a fool, who had no

better purpose in life than the rhyming of [illegible],

the tuning of lutes, the draining of flagons, and the

pressing of ladies' fingers in the dance. All of which,

produced, we are assured, upon the mind of the Duke

of Burgundy the very effect desired by Villon and his

[illegible] results which luckily we are enabled to know

more of, as Dom Gregory's manuscript happily resumes

continuity on the seventh day of Master François'

week of wonder.

We further learn—for Dom Gregory, though a

[illegible], seems to have a kindly spot in his heart

for the ways of lovers—that during those seven days,

the friendship of Villon and Katherine grew apace

until that the whole court watched with interest, and

Monsieur Noel le Jolys with an ever-increasing fury,

the growth of a great and beautiful passion. But

it seems that Master Villon, whether from fear to

[illegible] from a desire to leave the loveliest

[illegible] sign to the last, made no attempt

[illegible] himself or directly to learn how

high he stood in the Lady Katherine's heart until the very day which was the last day upon which it was possible for him to assure his own salvation.

IF I WERE TO DIE TO-MORROW

CHAPTER IX

ON the seventh day of Villon's week of wonder, his glory was at its greatest. No fairer day had graced that radiant month of June and no more splendid pageantry had adorned the illustrious reign of the new Grand Constable. Mimic battles, fountains running wine, free doles of food, fantastic pageants, grotesque dances, all the gorgeous mummery that the fifteenth century delighted in was offered in profusion to please the fancy and win the hearts of the people of Paris. But the crowning triumph was the great festival which the Grand Constable gave with the king's permission in the Bourbon rose garden, the magnificent masquerade in the Italian manner, to which all who were most [illegible] the great were summoned. This revelry [illegible] was intended to [illegible]

of the heavenly bodies. On the table by which the king and Villon were seated lay a large chart of the country in the immediate neighbourhood of Paris, and in front of the table stood three of the king's most trusty commanders, the Lord du Lau, the Lord Poncet de Rivière and the Lord of Nantoillet.

Villon had been explaining to the king and to his military advisers a scheme which had been growing in his mind throughout the week for the confusion of the enemy, a scheme for which the gorgeous entertainment to be given that evening was to serve as a golden mask. Villon touched a point on the map which represented a spot very familiar to him, a little dip in the swelling land, where he used to play as a child and gather wildflowers and hide himself, and imagine that he was a bandit or a great captain or a fairy prince—any one of the thousand illusions of childhood at its play.

"There, sire," he said. "If we can lure the Burgundians to that hollow, the day is ours. The sloping ground above it will mask a thousand men."

Poncet de Rivière leaned forward questioningly.

"Are you sure of the lay of the land?"

Villon answered positively:

"Sure. I played truant there when I was no higher than your sword belt."

[illegible]

Villon glanced up from the table in [illegible] astonishment.

"You may think me a raw soldier," he said, "yet I have practised strategy all my days."

The King answered him approvingly:

"My lord, you reason like a seasoned veteran."

Pleased with the praise Villon turned to the King. "Sire, I have blown it abroad that your majesty [illegible] to-night. While the Duke of Burgundy believes us to be carousing, we shall make a sortie from St. Anthony's gate. Our horses' hoofs will be muffled, our spurs shall jingle, and no bridle clink. We will steal through the night like shadows. At the appointed place few of us will make an attack upon [illegible]'s left and beat a retreat. This will [illegible]

"God knows where he came from and God knows where he will go to, but I would ride with him to the world's end."

"My father," said Poncet de Rivière, "told me often of the Maid of Orleans and her power with bearded men. He must be of her kindred, for he wins me against my will."

As the sound of their feet died away in the depths of the tower, Villon turned to the king.

"If the Duke of Burgundy falls into my trap," he said; "men will call me a great captain. Yet it is no more than remembering the shape of a meadow where I played in childhood. Strange that an urchin's playground should become a Golgotha of graves and glories."

The king clapped him playfully on the shoulder.

"Where did you learn wisdom?"

"In the school of hope deferred. When I was—what I was, I still believed that this dingy carcass swaddled a Roman spirit. In the pomp of my pallet I dreamed Olympian dreams. And the dreams have come true."

"You are an amazing fellow. Here in a week, you have made me more popular than I made myself since my accession. In court, in camp, in council, men are pleased to call you paragon."

[illegible] of the people [illegible]
[illegible] much. A week ago the good people of Paris
were disloyal enough. I repeal the tax on wine and
to-day they clap their hands and cry 'God save
King Louis' lustily. 'A week ago your soldiers were
mutinous because they were ill fed, worse clothed,
and never paid at all. I feed them full, clothe them
warm, pay them well, and to-day your majesty has
an army that would follow me to the devil if I whis-
tled a marching tune."

"But in the meantime, your sands are running
out. Is your heart failing? Is your pulse flagging?"

"Not a whit. I have been translated without
[illegible] from the tavern to the palace, and if the
[illegible] comes to the worst, I may say with the dying
[illegible] 'Applaud me.'"

[illegible] smiled melancholy.

"[illegible] the world?" he [illegible]

"Why, then, when the housewife moves [illegible] pale fire on the hearth of heaven to-morrow, I shall be quiet enough. But either way you have given me a royal week, and I have made the most of it, lived a thousand lives, eaten my cake to the last sweet crumb and have known the meaning of kingship."

Louis laughed.

"You speak as if you had reigned for a century."

Villon's sententious mood deepened.

"A man might live a thousand years and yet be no more account at the last than as a great eater of dinners. Whereas to suck all the sweet and snuff all the perfume but of a single hour, to push all its possibilities to the edge of the chessboard, is to live greatly though it be not to live long, and an end is an end if it come on the winged heels of a week or the dull crutch of a century."

Louis leaned back and looked at his companion in astonishment.

"Pray heaven this philosophy may sound as fine when your neck is in the halter."

"Your majesty's wit and my wish run nose and nose in a leash."

Louis changed the subject as if there were more important matters in the world than the life, loves and death even of a Grand Constable.

[illegible]

[illegible] are all a [illegible] sky [illegible] from heaven [illegible] divination."

Villon looked at him pityingly.

"Do you never tire of these sky doctrines?" he questioned.

Louis frowned, as he always frowned at any hint of disbelief in the science of the stars.

"Don't jest, master poet," he said, "but pay your suit with proud Kate, for I swear if you' run you shall hang to-morrow. Now leave me, for I must work while you play," and he bent over a chart that seemed to forget all else in his profound concentration.

[illegible]

William pulled a rose from a bush [illegible] gazed into its crimson heart as if he [illegible] there the secret which all flowers hold but [illegible] flower has ever yet betrayed to the longing [illegible] poet. He leaned against the statue of Pan [illegible] mused pensively.

"The petals of my reign are falling from me [illegible] of life, full of colour to the end. Shall I win this wonderful woman? Am I mad to hope it? If I lose, it is a short shrift and a long rope at the end of a dazzling dream."

He shivered as he thought and cast the rose he held away from him.

"How cold the June air seems, and these roses smell of graves." He paused a little till his hopes took heart again. "But if I win, how will it be, I wonder, to marry my heart's desire, to grow old sedately, to live again with the children on my knee, a little François here more honest than his father, a little Katherine there less comely than her mother!"

He flung out his hands as if he were dismissing the phantoms of his fancy.

"Run away, my dear dream children to your playground of shadows where you belong, for your father may be hanged to-morrow, and he fights for love and life to-night."

[illegible] and waited what came [illegible] pet. In obedience to the [illegible] many-coloured crowd of revellers poured from the palace and flowed like a glowing wave of merry-making down the steps and into the walks and alleys of the rose garden. All the strange figures that a freakish fancy could suggest leaped and danced and shouted in a rapture of mirth—[illegible] clowns and devils wheeled wildly by, waving torches, clashing cymbals, or screaming at the top of their voices, while sedater spirits, masked and muffled in mantles of sombre hue, moved through the tumultuous throng and found their pleasure in mystification and intrigue.

Villon had a mask in his girdle. He put it on, and pushing into the press allowed himself to drift hither and thither with the eddying currents of pleasure. His fantastic imagination took fire from the strange shapes and sounds about him. The sense of being in a dream, which had never deserted him from the first moment of his awakening [illegible]

Suddenly his attention was arrested by [illegible] of a voice that seemed familiar to him. [illegible] habited like a pilgrim from the Holy Land, [illegible] hood and gabardine of grey, and with the pilgrim's cockleshell on his shoulder, had met another man [illegible] habited like himself. The pair were exchanging salutations, in a speech that the speakers might well assume to be unknown to any person in the royal garden. The speech, however, jingled very familiarly on Villon's ear, for the man was talking in the amazing jargon which the worshipful company of cockleshells had devised for the better furtherance of their thievish purposes, and it appealed to Villon as intimately as a song that is learned in childhood.

The first pilgrim questioned the other.

"What do you carry in your scrip?"

And the second answered:

"I carry a cockleshell."

The first pilgrim questioned again:

"What do you carry in your hand?"

And the second responded:

"A foot of steel."

Yet again the first speaker queried:

"Will you drink the king's health?"

And the answer came decisively:

"In a flagon of Burgundy."

Whereat the two pilgrims laughed and [illegible] went their several ways and were swallowed up in the motley masquerade.

Villon's curiosity was piqued to the quick.

"How in heaven's name," he asked himself, "does it come to pass that people speaking the thieves' lingo of the Court of Miracles find themselves at a feast in the rose garden of King Louis?"

He set himself to try and track down one or the other of the mysterious pilgrims, but neither of them was to be found. His wanderings brought him back to the fair space at the foot of the terrace protected by the image of the god Pan. The place was deserted; the revellers had drifted elsewhere. A lute lay on the marble seat. Villon seated himself and, taking up the instrument who touching it [illegible] when a light step on the gravel arrested him. The sweetest voice in the world sounded in his ears. He [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

"You are a poet, my lord," said Katherine, "and this is an eve which should please a poet. Sing us a rhyme which shall match this night of summer."

Villon sighed a little.

"No rhyme ever rhymed was worth a beam of summer sun or summer moon; but I have lingered in Provence where every man is a nightingale, and I caught there the fever of improvisation. What shall I rhyme about?"

Katherine laughed as she pointed to her attendant ladies.

"Your suitors are women; therefore, nothing better nor worse than love."

"The burden of the world," Villon said. "Sigh, my lute, sigh."

He let his fingers ripple over the strings, waking the faint wail of a plaintive minor. In a moment or two he began to recite, touching every now and then a chord on his lute to emphasize the words he spoke:

"I wonder in what Isle of Bliss
  Apollo's music fills the air;
In what green valley Artemis
  For young Endymion spreads the snare:
Where Venus lingers debonair:
  The Wind has blown them all away—
And Pan lies piping in his lair—
  Where are the Gods of Yesterday?

"Say where the great [illegible]
Sleeps in a rose-red tomb, and [illegible]
The precious dust of Cæsar lie,
Or Cleopatra's yellow hair;
Where Alexander Do-and-Dare;
The Wind has blown them all away—
And Redbeard of the Iron Chair;
Where are the Dreams of Yesterday?

"Where is the Queen of Herod's kiss,
And Phryne in her beauty bare;
By what strange sea does Tomyris
With Dido and Cassandra share
Divine Proserpina's despair;
The Wind has blown them all away—
For what poor ghost does Helen care?
Where are the Girls of Yesterday?

"Alas for lovers! Pair by pair
The Wind has blown them all away:
The young and yare, the fond and fair;
Where are the Snows of Yesterday?"

The little group whom he addressed lingered in a gracious silence for a short space. Singur and the [illegible]

parted lips made Villon think of ripe pomegranates, her mind was wandering in the Islands of the Blest with the lovers and ladies whom Villon had praised. Villon dismissed melancholy with a jest:

"Sweet ladies," he said; "my song is sung. Do not let it dishearten you, for, believe me, it will snow again next year and lie white and light on the graves of dead lovers. Yesterday is dead, and to-morrow comes never."

He drew very close to Katherine and whispered the end of his sentence in her ear:

"Let us live and love to-day."

Katherine gave a little start as she dropped from cloudland and looked at him. He drew back and turned to the others.

"Fair ladies," he said; "shall we go to the great hall where the Italian players gambol?"

The women gathered about him, thanking him for his song, and then fluttered away like brilliant birds up the steps to the terrace. As they did so a figure in a pilgrim's gown came from the scented gloom of one of the rose alleys, paused for a moment as if undecided as to his course, and then proceeded to cross the space of moonlit grass. He did not heed Katherine, standing in the shadow, till he almost touched her. Then he glanced at her, and with a sudden

exclamation hurried past, [illegible] of an opposite alley, and disappeared. Katherine gave a little cry that was almost a cry of fear, and ran swiftly to where Villon stood apart at the foot of the steps awaiting her pleasure.

"My lord!" she cried, and he, turning, swiftly responded:

"My lady!"

"This masking kindles fancies. I thought but now that the eyes of Thibaut d'Aussigny glared on me from under a pilgrim's hood."

Villon frowned.

"A villainous apparition. For the news is that he lies dead in the camp of Burgundy."

Katherine gave a little shudder.

"I always hated him; almost feared him. If he be dead, I hope he will not haunt me. Ah! I tingle to-night like a lute that is tuned too high."

"Let us think of no evil things to-night," Villon responded. "Will you watch the players?"

Katherine shook her head.

"[illegible] a mood for [illegible]

hopes, and the brains of both were hives of happy thoughts.

"May I ask you a question?" Villon said, and the girl answered:

"Surely."

"Are you content with me?"

"You have done much."

"I have more to do. For seven days I have wrestled with greatness as Jacob wrestled with the angels; I have made the king popular, the Parisians loyal, the army faithful——"

"Then why do you linger here where courtiers feast and ladies dance?"

Villon's voice swelled proudly as he answered:

"I want the Duke of Burgundy to believe that the king's favourite is a zany, and the king's court an orgy, where the king's honour melts like a pearl in a pot of vinegar. But our swords are tempered in wine and sharpened to dance music, and to-night we ride."

The girl sighed. "I would that I were a man that I might ride with you."

Villon came close to her and peered into her eyes.

"I ride in your honour. Heaven has been very good to me, and I serve France serving you. Perhaps I serve both for the last time."

"For the last time?" she repeated.

[illegible] lanterns were out that I may die to-morrow. [illegible] of us will be dreaming our last dreams by [illegible] I may be one of those heavy sleepers."

"Why, you may die if you ride on the king's business, but so may I who sit at home and eat my heart."

"For whom?"

"I will tell you that to-morrow."

Villon touched her lightly on the wrist and pointed to the grey tower on whose weather-beaten wall the quaint old dial showed plainly in the bright moonlight, with its wise Latin inscription: "Dum Spectas, Fugit Hora, Carpe Diem."

"There is no time like now time. That old motto is as wise as the wisest." And he rapidly rendered the antique maxim into a running rhyme:

"Observe how fast time hurries past,
Then use each hour while in your power;
For copes the sun but time flies on,
Proceeding ever, returning never."

[illegible] tried to laugh.

"[illegible] and windows when Noah sailed the seas," [illegible] a little apart from him. "Villon

"Well, let to-morrow tell to-morrow's story. To-night I feel like a happy child in a world of make-believe. To-night we are immortal, you and I, wandering forever in this green garden under those indifferent stars, breathing this rose-scented air, spelling the secret of the world."

"You may say what you please to-morrow," she whispered, but Villon would not have it so.

"Alas, no! To-morrow I shall be mortally sober; to-night I am divinely drunk—drunk with star wine, flower wine, song wine. The stars burn my brain; the roses pierce my flesh; the songs trouble my soul. To-night, if I dared, I would ease my heart."

The girl spoke so faintly that only a lover's ears could hear the words:

"You may say what you please to-night."

Villon caught at his heart as if to keep it in the compass of his breast.

"If I were to die to-morrow, I would tell you this to-night: I love you. These are easy words to say, yet my heart fails as I say them, for their meaning is as full and musical as the Bell of Doom. Men are such fools that they have but one name for a thousand meanings, and beggar the poor love-word to base kitchen usages and work-a-day desires. But I would keep it holy for the flame which it [illegible]

[illegible] worship of another. I never knew what love was till I saw a girl's face on a May morning and whatever stripped the rind from my naked heart. The God in me leaped into being to greet the God in your eyes. I love you. This is what I would say if I were to die to-morrow."

He was very close to her now, and his eyes were looking into her eyes. She answered him frankly:

"If you were to die to-morrow, I might tell you this much to-night. A woman may love a man because he is brave, or because he is comely, or because he is wise, or gentle—for a thousand thousand reasons. But the best of all reasons for a woman loving a man is just because she loves him, without rhyme and without reason, because heaven wills it, because earth fulfils it, because his hand is of the right size to hold her heart in its hollow."

[illegible] hands were closely clasped, the lips [illegible] nearer to meeting. Only the [illegible]

In the sudden bliss that had come upon both lovers they paid no heed to a footstep upon the terrace, till a voice struck like a sword-stroke across their ecstasy, the voice of Noel le Jolys.

"Where are the lovers of yesterday?" Noel said mockingly as he slowly descended the steps to join them.

There was a red rage in Villon's heart, but he bridled it as he turned upon the interloper contemptuously.

"Your pink and white lady-bird," he said to Katherine, and then waving his hand at Noel with a gesture of disdain and dismissal, chanted at him:

"Lady-bird, lady-bird, fly away home."

Noel's pink face flushed a poppy red and his white hand went to his sword hilt. There was courage in the foppish substance, and he would clearly have rejoiced to try his chance in a passage-at-arms.

"My lord," he said, "I will measure word and sword with you at any season, but now I seek promised speech with this lady."

Villon laughed at his menace.

"While I have better business in hand, you shall know only the smooth of my tongue and the flat of my falchion. Compass your swelling heart lest you play the lion before a lady."

[illegible]

eager to spring at each [illegible]

dropped her restraining hand on Villon's [illegible]

"My lord," she whispered, "he has [illegible] for audience. I will speak with you again [illegible] ride."

Villon turned to her.

"We ride at nine, remember," he said in a low voice; and then in a louder tone, looking at Noel, he added mockingly, "Till then I shall busy myself in writing my last will and testament, and bequeathing a thousand nothings to a thousand nobodies to gull the posterity. You shall taste of my bounty, Messire Noel," and he began to improvise derisively:

"To Messire Noel, named the neat
By those who love him, I bequeath
A helmless ship, a houseless street,
A wordless book, a swordless sheath,
An hourless clock, a leafless wreath,
A bed sans sheet, a board sans meat,
A bell sans tongue, a saw sans teeth,
[illegible] complete."

"Do you leave me nothing?" Ka[illegible] pered, and Villon answered:

"Now and always the heart of my heart."

He turned on his heel and glided into the [illegible] darkness of the rose alley, alone with exq[illegible] thoughts.

Katherine turned to Noel haughtily.

"Well?" she said.

"I have always to seek you nowadays," Noel protested.

Katherine tossed her head, and her tresses trembled like leaves in the moonlight.

"The world is not yet so old that the wooing must be done by women."

"I am out of favour," Noel complained, "since a fellow from nowhere plays the fool in high places."

Katherine's eyes showered scorn upon him.

"I do not hate you for railing at him, but it does not help me to love you."

Noel caught at the word.

"You loved me once," he asserted.

She shook her head pityingly.

"We played with great words as children play with coloured balls. It is easy to say 'I love you,' and often very sweet; yet the coloured balls roll into the corner, and the child forgets them when the moon of childhood wanes."

A whimsical hesitation [illegible] countenance.

"You have outgrown me?" he questioned.

Katherine drew away from him till the moonlight that shone between them lay wide and white. She answered quietly:

"My soul was in bud a week ago. To-day it is in blossom."

Noel threw up his arms impatiently.

"God have mercy! What can this fellow do that is denied to me? Can he stride a horse, or fly a hawk better? show a brighter sword in quarrel, or tune a smoother lute in calm? Can he out-dance me, out-drink me, out-courtier me, out-soldier me? No, no, no! And must I now believe that he can out-love me?"

Katherine, weary of the controversy, began to ascend the steps to the palace. She [illegible] mounted [illegible]

Katherine frowned at his mystery.

"You speak like a scented Sphinx, but I am not idle for enigmas. Farewell!" and she vanished into the palace.

Noel looked after her fretfully:

"Why are the women all sunflowers to this scarcemouch?" he asked himself querulously. "Well, there are other women, and a wise man gathers the nearest grapes."

A flagon and cup stood on the table by the marble seat. Noel poured himself out some wine and drank it, seeking consolation. His duty called him shortly to the service of the king, but he lingered in the garden on the chance of a hoped-for meeting.

"I shall be revenged," he said to himself, "if my astrologer plays his part and tells the weak king that this Lord of Montcorbier is his evil spirit."

His thoughts were busy with the events of the past week; if Katherine had been disdainful, the girl Huguette had been kind, and the Golden Scull had found the dainty soldier a frequent visitor. It was Huguette who, after listening to Noel's complaints of the Grand Constable, had suggested to him, in apparent artlessness of heart, that he could play upon the king's superstitions through a new astrologer and had promised to find him a star-gazer who

[illegible] wished to [illegible]
to Noel, and this very [illegible]
to bring the astrologer to him, to which end he [illegible]
entrusted her with a password which would [illegible]
strangers into the royal garden.

As he mused, a figure in a pilgrim's gown [illegible]
cautiously out of the shadows into the moonlight
behind him and stood for a moment watching him.
The god Pan could see the face that smiled under
the pilgrim's hood—a girl's face, with bright eyes
framed in golden hair, but when the girl saw Noel
she slipped a mask over her face, drew her pilgrim's
gown closely about her slim body, and tiptoed
lightly across the grass to touch Noel on the
shoulder.

Noel turned with a start, and faced, as he believed,
a masquerading pilgrim.

"May I vend you a benevolence, [illegible]
Huguette asked, disguising her voice in an [illegible]
ier gruffness.

Noel [illegible]

"[illegible] pilgrim, I am in no [illegible]
[illegible]

"Are you in a maid's mood, or a [illegible] maid?"

Noel stopped impatiently.

"Are you pander as well as pilgrim? I wait for woman."

The pilgrim's pertinacity was not to be baffled.

"Is she tall or short, young or old, dark or fair, sweet or sour?"

Noel answered whimsically:

"She is of the colour of the chameleon, of the age of the ancient world, of the height of any man's heart, and as bitter-sweet as a crushed quince."

The girl pulled off her mask and threw back her hood.

"Is she of my feet, favour, years and savour?"

The moment he saw her face Noel gave a cry of delight.

"You are welcome, witch," he shouted, "for you bring the best love in the world!"

He sprang to catch the girl in his arms, but she repulsed him gently.

"Hush! I am no love-monger now, no gallantry girl, but a most politic plotter. The world spins like a potter's wheel to shape the vessel of our enterprise. We have a wizard ready for your king. Will Louis come?"

Noel nodded [illegible]

"As linnet to looking-glass. He is grave [illegible] wisdom. Does your astrologer know his lesson?

"He is parrot-perfect. When all is quiet, give an owl's cry thrice, and a friend will bring him. He will warn the king against his Grand Constable; he will praise Tristan, applaud Olivier, and commend Messire Noel le Jolys."

Noel chuckled.

"Then I shall be king of the castle, and you shall have a great gold chain and pearls as big as a virgin's tears."

Noel did not detect the scorn in Huguette's voice as she answered with apparent amiability:

"You know the way to win a woman."

"I am no jingling rhyme-broker, I thank heaven," Noel cried. "I pay my way."

He caught Huguette in his arms as he spoke and sought to kiss her, but she avoided him dexterously.

"I will kiss you when you win," she cried.

Noel would have pushed his suit further, but at that moment the great clock of the palace chimed the half-hour and struck upon his memory, as upon his ear. He knew that the King [illegible] and he [illegible] and threatening [illegible]

"[illegible]

[illegible]

He opened the door of the tower and [illegible] moment looking regretfully at the girl, who [illegible] at him temptingly, then he passed in and drew [illegible] door behind him.

The moment he had disappeared, the girl's beauty changed. Her face and gesture blazoned a world of contempt for her courtier lover.

"Fool, dunce, dolt, ass, peacock, buzzard, owl!" she stormed. Then her rage faded and she turned sadly on her heel as another man's name came into her heart and fluttered to her lips. "The world is as sour as a rotten orange since François went into exile."

Her glance fell on the lute which lay on the marble seat where Villon had left it. She took it up and began to thrum it pensively, whispering to herself the words of Villon's song:

> "Daughters of Pleasure, one and all,
> Of form and features delicate,"

she murmured to herself. As she did so, Villon, weary of wandering in the rose alleys, came into the moonlit space and saw the cloaked and hooded figure where it sat. In a moment his mind recalled the strange greetings he had overheard between the two pilgrims.

"There is another of these pilgrims," [illegible] himself, determined now to solve the mystery. He crossed the grass quickly to the figure's side and saluted it.

"Hail, little brother."

Huguette leaped to her feet and answered lightly:

"Hail, little sister."

"Why little sister?" Villon asked in some astonishment.

The masked pilgrim answered him smartly:

"If I am a brother of yours, you must need be a sister of mine. But you talk out of the litany."

"What harm," Villon retorted, "if you give me responses?"

Huguette shrugged her shoulders.

"I will give you no more than good-bye," she said and turned to leave him, but Villon caught her by the arm.

"You shall not show me your heels till I [illegible] myself your face," he insisted.

Before the girl could prevent him he had [illegible] held her fast and snatched the mask from her face. To his astonishment, he found himself looking into [illegible] eyes of Margueritte, and in [illegible] [illegible]

"Who are you?" she asked.

For answer, Villon unmasked.

Huguette looked closely into his face, at first without any sign of recognition, then suddenly the knowledge came to her and she caught him in her arms with a cry of joy.

"François, you dear devil, where have you been this thousand years? They said you were banished. How brave you are! Where did you steal so much splendour? Are you cutting purses? Are you plucking mantles?"

Villon tried to stay her questions.

"What are you doing here, Abbess?"

"The fair fool Noel has taken a week-long fancy to me, and I am making an age-long fool of him. Kiss me," she urged, putting her face very near to Villon's. Villon drew back his head.

"You should keep your kisses for the fair fool Noel."

Huguette drew away from him angrily.

"When you were as lean as a cat and as ragged as a sparrow, you were not so nice a precisian. Has some great lady bewitched you? Can you only woo in silk and win in velvet? If the kernel be sweet, what does the husk matter? Heaven's pity! Why should a woman love you?"

Villon took no notice of her [illegible] repeated his question:

"What are you doing here, Abbess?"

The girl's rage was as short as a summer's shower. She turned again to him, fondling him.

"Well, I cannot shut the door of my heart in your smooth face. René de Montigny has a great game afoot, and you are back in time to share in it."

"What game?" Villon asked.

Huguette answered:

"The fair fool Noel, advised by me, has persuaded the king to see an astrologer here to-night when the gardens are quiet. Noel believes that the astrologer will advise the king to fling his Grand Constable out of the window and call Messire Noel in at the door, but the comrades of the cockleshell really mean much more mischief. When once we get the king within reach of our fingers, we mean to snap him up and carry him out of Paris, willy nilly, and sell him to the Duke of Burgundy."

Villon caught his breath.

"A great game!" he cried. "But who is the astrologer?"

"Thibaut d'Aussigny," she answered, "who pretends to be dead, but who lives for this revenge."

Villon leaped to his feet. He remembered Bellerofte, the [illegible] who had sent [illegible]

"Then it was he!" he said.

Huguette went on with her story.

"Noel is to give us the signal by crying an owl's cry thrice."

Villon was revolving many thoughts in his mind and he hardly heeded her.

"This adventure of the astrologer might be turned to my advantage. Here is a chance in a thousand," he muttered to himself, as he paced restlessly on the grass. "I have but to close my eyes and shut my ears and the good Thibaut carries the good Louis to the good Burgundy to-night, and there can be no hanging to-morrow."

The girl followed after him, catching at his sleeve to stay him.

"What are you talking about?"

Villon went on, unheeding her, whispering to himself:

"If they cut Gaffer Louis' throat between them, the world were rid of a crooked-witted king, and I free to win Katherine, hold Paris, be the first man in France——"

"François, speak to me," Huguette pleaded, but she pleaded in vain.

"One would say I were a fool to let such occasion slip through my ten commandments. But I have

learned a thing called honor, which I [illegible] for the sake of my lady."

Huguette flung herself in front of him and stopped his restless walk.

"François! François!"

"Yes, child, yes."

"What does it matter to you what they do with the fool king?"

"Abbess, I must have a finger in this pie. Abbess, for the old sake's sake, will you keep me a secret?"

The girl looked up at him lovingly.

"I will always do your bidding."

"I have a mind to play my part in this enterprise. I am the king of the Cockleshells and I have returned to authority. Give me your pilgrim's gown, girl, and mind, not a word to the brotherhood. I want to take friend Thibaut by surprise."

As he spoke, he pulled off the pilgrim's gown, and Huguette stood before him in her familiar boy's dress of green.

"[illegible] among the rows until the sport begins," he [illegible]

[illegible] about him.

[illegible] cried, [illegible]

Villon looked after the girl as she [illegible]

"The girl is as fleet as a hare and as wild [illegible]" he said to himself. Then he flung Huguette from [illegible] thoughts and faced the great problem.

"How does the balance go?" he asked himself, and he weighed the air with his hands as if their cups held the precious things he spoke of.

"In the one hand, a great king's life; in the other, a poor poet's honour. King, beggar, beggar, king."

He paused a moment, looking down the long lane of infinite possibilities. He owed nothing to Louis after all. Louis had made him the plaything of a shameless trick; had thrust honour upon him in mockery; had tantalized him with a dream of a dream. Ere another sunset, if a woman's heart were not his for the winning, he would be swinging, grisly enough, with his tongue through his teeth, and the ravens wheeling about his ears, upon the Paris gallows. It was but to let Thibaut d'Aussigny play out his play and snare the old black fox, and then Villon had Paris to himself, was absolved from all penalty, might in the light of the new love the people had for him, do, or at least try to do, pretty much as he pleased with the kingless kingdom. It was a dazzling prospect.

"Why not?" he asked himself. Then, in a mo[illegible]

[illegible] be cheated, not to be laughed. He had given his word; he had sworn fealty to the fantastic [illegible] who had played with him and to whom he owed at least the realization of great dreams and the golden chance of winning his heart's desire. He had given his word. That would not have meant much to him eight days ago when he lived in a sick atmosphere of lies and dodges and tricks and meanness, where the lips were as ready to deceive as the fingers to filch, and where a successful falsehood was almost as much applauded as a successful theft. But now, as he had said, he had learned a thing called honour; the whole meaning of life had been changed for him in the sunshine of a fair girl's favour, and what was but yesterday possible, probable, even pleasant, was to-day merely impossible. He murmured her name to himself—"Katherine!"—as a charm against [illegible] [illegible] and his heart strengthened [illegible]

"Messire Noel," he said; "I have a [illegible] in your ear," and he drew him inside the tower [illegible] stood with him for a moment in the darkness, [illegible] pering speech that made Noel's pulse beat fast. Then Villon left him and sped swiftly up the winding stairs that led to the king's room, while Noel, left alone, pushed open the door again and passed out into the garden, his head dizzy with strange news. Placing his hands like a shell about his mouth, he gave the cry of an owl three times with a little interval between each cry, and then softly withdrew again into the tower, and in his turn raced with a throbbing heart up the narrow steps that led to the king's chamber.

CHAPTER X

UNDER WHICH KING?

THE rose garden seemed to be as quiet as a churchyard. No sound was heard save the faint soughing of the evening wind among the rose bushes, no sight resembling humanity visible save the face of Pan looking down mockingly upon the crimson blossoms that girdled him. Yet in a few seconds it became plain that the god Pan was not the only occupant of the garden. Through quiet alleyways, cloaked and cowled figures came stealing, six in number—men with pilgrims' cloaks about their shoulders, and pilgrims' hoods upon their heads—men who carried [illegible] upon the sleeves of their [illegible]

"Aye, and ready to gather the royal roses of the garden."

As he spoke there came a faint click at the latch of the tower door. Thibaut waved his companions apart.

"Keep close," he said, and four of the pilgrim forms disappeared swiftly into the spaces of shadow. Only Thibaut and René remained, standing masked and attentive, their eyes fixed upon the tower door. It opened and Noel le Jolys emerged, followed by the slight, hunched figure in faded black velvet for whom the eyes of the conspirators were so eager. Noel advanced questioning:

"Is the star-gazer here?"

René de Montigny answered him glibly as a showman patters the praise of his wares.

"Aye. He is the wonder of the world. He can read the stars more easily than a tapster the score on his shutter. He can spell you the high luck and the low. Bohemian, Egyptian, Arabian wisdom have no mysteries for him."

As René ceased, the royal figure with a sweeping gesture of his hand made a sign of dismissal to Noel, who bowed respectfully and withdrew into the tower. The king then beckoned to the mighty figure in the palmer's weed, and Thibaut advanced slowly

[illegible] he was [illegible] deaf [illegible] dealy flung out his great hand and caught [illegible] by the throat, gripping him into [illegible] right hand bared and brandished a dagger. The figure in black dropped under his grasp, [illegible] and gasped, but the hand of Thibaut was too [illegible] upon him and he could not speak or cry out. Thibaut hissed at him:

"Sire, I can decipher your destiny. Do not speak or I will kill you!"

He pressed the point of the dagger close to the captive's neck and smiled to see him shudder.

"I am Thibaut d'Aussigny, sire, whom you thought to be dead, but who lives to poison you!"

As he spoke his companion [illegible] [illegible] gloves and [illegible] [illegible]

He pushed the king from him, [illegible] the king dropped on the ground a black [illegible] heap of fear.

"Can a king be such a cur? Burgundy won't [illegible] you if you do as he bids you. I won't hurt you [illegible] you do as I bid you."

The black figure rocked, a pitiable bundle of terrors, apparently sobbing plaintively. Thibaut sickened at such shameless fear.

"Stop crying," he growled.

René de Montigny, who had been watching keenly the actions of the prisoner, interrupted:

"He seems to be laughing," he said.

Thibaut gave a cry of astonishment and stooped down over the prostrate man, who greeted him with a prolonged and hearty peal of laughter, which staggered the giant like a blow in the face. At that moment the tower door was flung open and Tristan appeared.

"The king!" he cried in a voice of thunder.

In another moment, as if by magic, the little garden space was girdled by the archers of the Scottish Guard, strong hands made sure of the baffled conspirators, and to their astonishment Louis himself made his appearance through the open doorway, his malign face smiling in the moonlight.

THE [illegible]

THE sham king [illegible]
flung off the black [illegible]
saints and the rusty, black mantle [illegible]
the king's habit, and stood delighted [illegible]
before Thibaut, the François Villon who [illegible]
second time had crossed his path.

"Well, friend, what has the wizard told you?" [illegible]
Louis asked blandly.

Villon swayed with laughter as he pointed to [illegible]
bewildered giant.

"Wonders, sire," he answered. "I have [illegible]
laughed so heartily since I attained [illegible]
even as he spoke Thibaut had recovered his [illegible]
might be defeated but he would not be [illegible]

"You shall laugh no more!" he shouted [illegible]
ing himself free from restraint, and he [illegible]
enemy with lifted dagger.

From behind the shadow of the [illegible]
there came a warning shriek, and swiftly [illegible]
Villon and Thibaut a [illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible]

With a curse Thibaut turned and, sw[illegible] the archers who tried to stop him, disappe[illegible] the nearest alley. Noel le Jolys, drawing his [illegible] rushed in pursuit, followed by several soldiers. [illegible]lon held the bleeding body of the girl in his [illegible] and tried his best to stanch the wound which [illegible] staining the green jerkin a dull red, but the girl pr[illegible] tested faintly, pushing his ministering hand away.

"Let me alone; I am done for," she gasped.

Olivier was by her side in an instant, eyeing the wound with the professional interest of the surgeon-barber and looking from it to the girl's pale face. Villon's gaze questioned him. Olivier shrugged his shoulders and shook his head. Villon knew that the wound was mortal, and his own blood seemed like water within him. He carried the girl across the grass to the marble seat and rested her on it, the red stain on the green coat growing wider and wider as they moved.

"Courage, Abbess, courage, lass," he whispered, fighting with his horror and his sorrow as he moaned to himself: "That any one should die for me!"

The girl's arms clung closer about his neck and her lips moved faintly. He stooped close to her to catch her words.

"This is a strange end, François. I always

thought I should die in a [illegible] of battlefield. Give me drink."

"Some water," Villon cried to Olivier, who stood a little apart from the pair with the resigned look of the physician who knows that his art is of no avail.

Huguette protested faintly.

"Not water. Wine. I have ever loved the taste of it, and 'tis too late to change now."

Olivier filled a cup from the flagon on the table and was for lifting it to the girl's lips, but her feeble hand repulsed him and she pleaded to Villon:

"Give it to me, François."

Villon took the cup from the barber's hand, lifted it to the dying girl's lips, and she drank greedily. The strong wine gave her for a moment something of its own false strength, and she struggled to her feet, Villon rising with her and supporting her.

"Your health, François. I suppose I have been a great sinner. Will God forgive me?"

Villon smiled a heavy grean, but he was [illegible] enough for if he could, and, instead, he [illegible] words of consolation.

"He understands his children."

The heavy [illegible] shoulders.

"[illegible]

Then suddenly clasping him tightly, she [illegible] "Many men have taken my body; only you ever [illegible] my heart. Give me your lips."

Villon's spirit was troubled. It seemed to him that his lips were bound to wait for that kiss of his lady's, and yet the dying girl loved him and he had loved the dying girl after a fashion, and he could not refuse her now. He bent to grant her prayer, when suddenly she shook herself free from his arms and began to sing faintly the words of the song he had made for her:

"Daughters of Pleasure, one and all,

Then she caught her breath with a sob and slipped to the last lines of the verse:

"Use your red lips before too late,
Love ere love flies beyond recall."

She shook her head back in a wild peal of laughter: then she gave a great cry and fell forward. Villon caught her, looked in her face and knew that she was dead, and that the best of his old bad life lay dead with her.

Olivier in obedience to an order of the king's, gave a signal and the girl's body was swiftly wrapped in a soldier's cloak and laid gently upon a pair of crossed halberds. As this was being done,

Noel le Jolys came [illegible] in his hand.

"Thibaut d'Auneigny is dead, sire," he said; "my hand was the hand that finished him."

Then as his eyes fell on the dead body, they sho[illegible] with sudden tears. Villon went up to him and touched him on the shoulder.

"I leave this dead woman in your hands," he said, "for I think you had a kindness for her. See that she has Christian burial."

Noel bowed his head and followed in silence the girl's body. The garden was left to Louis and Villon, Tristan and Olivier, and the handful of captured rogues who stood apart, strongly guarded and stripped of their pilgrims' garb, gazing amazed at Louis and his double. Villon, silent too, looked after the little group that bore away the dead girl's body. His mind was a warfare of wild memories. Strange recollections of times and places with Huguette came crowding up and beating piteously upon his brain. He thought of what he had been, and groaned; of what he was now, and his soul cried out as in prayer in the name of Katherine.

CHAPTER XII

A VIRGIN'S TEARS

THE king's hand fell upon his shoulder and shattered his meditations.

"Are you so dashed by the death of a wanton?" the king asked mockingly.

Villon turned upon him in a noble rage.

"She had God's breath in her body, sire," he said. Then drawing his hand across his forehead as if to dissipate the sad fancies that oppressed him, he went on:

"I have been John-a-Nods for the moment, sire; now I am Jack-a-Deeds again. The hour for battle is at hand."

Louis shrugged his shoulders.

"You have done me a good turn, gossip," he said, "and may ask any grace of me except your life. That depends on your lady."

Villon looked over at the corner where his old boon companions were huddled together, the miserable centre of a circle of soldiers.

"Sire," he said; "grant me the lives of those rascals. They shall ride with me and fight for France to-night. It is better than making them play bob-apple on the evil tree."

The king whispered a few words to Tristan, and Tristan very reluctantly gave the order of liberation. The comrades of the Cockleshell were freed of their bonds and bade to stand apart, under guard and out of earshot, to wait on destiny for further commands. At this moment Louis, glancing upwards, caught sight between the flower vases on the terrace of a gleam of crimson, the crimson silk of a woman's robe. It betrayed the presence of Katherine de Vaucelles, who had come hard upon the hour of nine to seek for her lover, but who paused irresolute at the head of the stairs, noting the presence of the king. Louis beckoned to her amicably, and she began slowly to descend the staircase. Louis came over to Villon and whispered in his ear:

"Here comes your lady. I think your love-fruit is ripe and you need not stand on tip-toe to pick it."

Villon answered him with burning eyes:

"Sire, I believe I have won the rose of the world."

Louis chuckled like an enraptured raven.

"The Count of Montcorbier is luckier than François Villon. But the lady has a high mind and a fierce spirit. She may not relish the description of the chest his lie."

Something in the king's words [illegible] his face burned like a [illegible]

seemed to quench them. He was like a man who long playing at blind-man's-buff, suddenly has the bandage plucked from his eyes and stands dazzled and blinking in the sunlight. After all, he was not the Count of Montcorbier; after all, he was not the Grand Constable of France; after all, he was only a masquerading beggar who had won the heart of a lady under false colours; who had triumphed by flying a false flag. In all those seven splendid days this simple thought had never come to him. His whole soul had been so taken captive by the fascination of the part he had been permitted to play that he forgot he was playing a part, and allowed his fancy to believe that a week-long dream would endure forever. Now he knew himself and what he had done and what he must do. A divine farce had turned to sudden tragedy. He turned to the king with a groan.

"Cheat, lie," he repeated. "Sire, those words fling me from my fool's paradise. Kill me if I fail to win her, but I will tear this mask from my face, this falsehood from my heart."

Louis grinned at him.

"Please yourself. Win her or swing. Either way contents me."

As he spoke, he turned away. Katherine had

descended the steps and was moving across the [illegible] to greet her here, who stood with clasped hands in the moonlight like a man struck dumb. Katherine was carrying in her hands a crimson scarf fringed with gold, and she lifted it to him as she spoke.

"Wear this with my prayers. With it, I give you my hand and heart. You shall carry my plighted troth with you into the battle. Let me tell my love to all the world."

Swiftly and lightly she threw it about his neck before he could find words, but now he spoke:

"Wait, wait! You must say no more until you know me."

The girl's eyes widened with surprise.

"Do I not know you?"

Villon thrust his face forward very close to hers.

"Look into my face," he said. "Look well. Do you see nothing there that reminds you of other hours?"

Katherine smiled divinely.

"Of happy hours in this rose garden."

Villon insisted fiercely:

"No, no! Of a dark night, a tavern, a cloaked woman, a sordid fellow dreaming sottishly by the fire, a prayer, a love-tale and a promise, a crowd of bullies and wantons, a quarrel, a fight with swords

and lantern in the dark, a breast [illegible] flung from a gallery——"

Katherine recoiled a little, with a horror in her eyes.

"What are you trying to tell me?" she asked.

Villon dropped on his knees with a groan.

"Here is the knot of ribbon which you flung to me in the Fircone Tavern. Oh, pity me! I am François Villon."

Katherine pressed her hands to her forehead.

"I can hear what you say, but it makes no mark on my brain."

Villon's words ran fast from him:

"I am François Villon and yet no longer he, for my old evil self is dead. I am François Villon who served you with his sword, who praised you with his pen, and who loves you with all his soul."

The girl's whole body shook with fear as she answered:

"It isn't true! It isn't true! I don't believe you."

Villon sprang to his feet.

"Whatever my fate is," he cried, "you shall know the truth."

Turning to where the released conspirators stood apart, he called to them peremptorily:

"Guy! René! All of you, come here!"

Amazed to be thus summoned to their aid by so great a personage as the Grand Constable of France, the thieves crept forward timidly and, in obedience to Villon's commanding gestures, gathered about him as he turned to them, pressing his face near to their faces, and cried:

"Look at me closer—closer. Don't you know François Villon in spite of this new spirit shining in his eyes?"

René de Montigny gave a cry of recognition.

"I should never have known you. You are so strangely changed."

Guy Tabarie endorsed him.

"Still, 'tis his dear old countenance."

Katherine watching the scene in sick despair, turned piteously to the king.

"Sire, sire, is this true?"

Louis, who had been watching all with unmitigated satisfaction, answered fleeringly:

"Most true, pretty mistress. You disdained me for this."

With blinding eyes and trembling hands Katherine [illegible] across the grass to where Villon stood.

"[illegible] why did you live this lie?"

[illegible] desperately:

Katherine's anger flamed into a great [illegible]

"Do not shame the sweet word. I hate you! [illegible] think the face that I have learned to love [illegible] mask so base a heart!"

Then as Villon drew a little closer to her, in an agony of entreaty, she struck out at him with both hands, beating him on the breast in an unconquerable fury. Villon bowed beneath the blow while she raged at him:

"You have stolen my love like a thief, you have crucified my pride. I hate you! Go back to the dregs and lees of life, skulk in your tavern, forget, what I shall never forget, that so base a thing as you ever came near me!"

The king was by her side in an instant and whispering into her ear:

"Is this the course of true love?"

She swung upon him in scorn.

"Sire, you have wreaked a royal revenge upon a woman. There are no tears in my eyes yet, but I pray they will come that I may weep myself clean of this memory."

With clasped hands and set lips she moved away from Louis and stood apart in the moonlight, a fixed and rigid figure of despair. Louis stepped to where Villon stood in stricken anguish and whispered to him:

"I am afraid you will [illegible] Villon."

Villon threw back his head defiantly.

"I should be glad to greet the gallows now, but I have a deed to do before I die."

As he spoke the great bell of the palace beat out the first stroke of the hour of nine. It roused the wounded spirit in his soul. He moved to where Katherine stood and spoke to her:

"I dreamed that love through which I have been born again could lift me to your lips. The dream is over. But you bade me serve France, and I ride and fight for you to-night."

While he spoke the Lords of Lau, of Rivière and of Nantoillet in panoply of war came from the palace with their immediate followers. The garden began to fill with the picked men of the enterprise hurrying on the summons of the warning bell to follow their leader on his sortie. Villon's pages brought the armour of the Grand Constable and began to buckle it upon him. [illegible]

that renew you—the women that love you." A moment his voice quailed and almost failed him. There were happy men there, no doubt, whom women loved. But he rallied in a breath and his voice rang out valiantly again: "Forward in God's name and the king's!"

And every soldier present echoed him:

"Forward in God's name and the king's!"

THE REDE OF F[illegible]

THROUGH the silent streets of Paris [illegible] line of steel moved slowly—the thread of wh[illegible] ter François Villon was the needle pricked to [illegible] the realm of France together. The Grand-Constable rode at the head with the Lords of Lau, of Rivière, and of Nantoillet, and somewhere at the tail rode the five released rascals and babbled beneath their breaths as they rode. For the order to keep silence did not count until the gates of Paris were [illegible] and began to turn on their hinges to let Villon's venturers forth. Every man of the ruffians [illegible] stout sword swinging at his girdle; every man [illegible] them sported a steel cap upon his head; every man of them felt his heart pulsing with rare [illegible] and his brain busy with strange thoughts. [illegible] Montigny spoke first the thing that filled his mind.

"It must be a devil of a business," he [illegible] "to be bullied like that by a beauty. Blood, [illegible] but she can bellow [illegible]

[illegible]

relish the [illegible]

[illegible]

Something in the king's words [illegible] his fury [illegible] like a [illegible]

lips. It was meat and drink to look at her and [illegible] thoughts."

Jehan le Loup frowned sourly. "Had I been Master François and black Louis not been by I should have tried to mend my luck with a cudgel. At best and worst she would have had something to curse for after a lusty thumping."

Casin Cholet licked his lips. "I shall think of her," he said, "when next I meet with a sweetheart. With a little wit your honest rascal can be as happy as a king. In the dark all fur is of the same colour."

Colin de Cayeulx yawned. "What are we going a-riding for?" he questioned. "I would sooner have stayed in the king's rose garden and filled my belly as we did last week when the great lord in gold tissue pitied us. And to think that it was no more than François after all! I could jam my dagger between his shoulder-blades for making such a ninny of me."

"I knew him all the time," Guy Tabarie was beginning when René de Montigny silenced him with a ringing clip on the nearest ear which nearly unsaddled the fat rogue. "You lie, Mountain, you lie," he whispered. "Do you think that if he cheated me your pig's eyes could read the riddle? No, no, he fooled us fairly and he fooled us well, but he treated us kindly and we can afford to cry quits."

[illegible]
a man's cheek, with some matter of [illegible]
a smooth jerkin, can make such a [illegible]

"Not at all," said René de Montigny, "[illegible]
the same at the core, every man-jac[illegible]
of us, hungering, thirsting, lusting, [illegible]
same fashion. 'Tis only the coat that counts."

"'Tis you who lie now," grunted Tabari[illegible]
no gold tissue in the world that would [illegible]
cunning as François. You would never have [illegible]
as he did if the king had made you [illegible]
litter."

René whistled through his teeth. [illegible]
may be not," he said. "No man can tell [illegible]
may do till he is given his chance to test his [illegible]
Oh opportunity, golden opportunity! [illegible]
François Villon I would shape an image of [illegible]
your name and praise you for a saint."

"I wonder what that girl will say," mu[illegible]
rie, "if our François comes back with the [illegible]
Burgundy in his pocket!"

"I wonder what she will say," sneered [illegible]
Loup, "if he trundles back feet foremost [illegible]
in his body and half a head."

"Whatever [illegible] is sure to vex [illegible]

"Our poor minions will be lonely to-night," said Colin.

"I doubt it," said René de Montigny drily, and then he sighed a little. "Poor Abbess!"

Sudden tears smeared Tabarie's fat cheeks.

"She was a brave wench if ever," he snivelled. "Through wellfare or illfare she was always the same, and would share board and blanket with a friend though his pouch were as barren as Sarah's body."

"It was ten thousand pities," said René, "that she fell so love-sick for François. Did he give her some philtre, some elixir, do you think? François is a fine fellow though, I'll not deny it, but he's had the devil's own luck, and by our patron St. Nicholas there be others as fine as he."

As he spoke the great gate of the city yawned noiselessly, and stealthy and silent the hope of Paris glided into the darkness and was swallowed up by the night.

CHAPTER XIV

THE BANNERS OF BURGUNDY

THE yellow dawn, rippling over Paris, found her streets strangely silent, strangely quiet. A few good citizens were abed, but most good citizens were abroad on that kindly June morning, for there was business doing outside the walls of Paris which tempted every man inside the walls to those walls, and that business was the battle that was raging, and had raged since nightfall, between the troops of King Louis on one side under the Grand Constable of France, and the troops of the Duke of Burgundy and his allies on the other. Paris might have been that strange city of slumber told of by the wandering in the Arabian tale, or that poppied palace where the sleeping beauty and her court lay waiting the coming of the hero. If Asmodeus whisking his way on the wings of the wind with any astonished travelling companion in tow had paused over Paris and unroofed it for the benefit of his fellow-voyager, most of the rooms would have been found as empty as the streets.

But there was one room in the city—an open room [illegible]

church of the Celestins—which was alive and with a strange activity of its own. It was early enough and the windows of its houses stared vacantly upon its emptiness, but there were two men in possession of its tranquillity who had been toiling hard at a singular piece of work. They were putting the finishing touches to the erection of a tall, gaunt gallows with its steps and platform, which occupied a space midway between the gateway and the grey old Gothic church. In curious contrast to the sinister grimness of the gibbet, there rose opposite to it on the side of the church a dais, richly draped with royal velvet, splendidly spangled with fleur-de-lis and brave with armourial bearings.

The two men who were working at the gallows having finished their job, came out into the open space and stretched themselves. One was a tall, thin, grave, poplar-tree of a man, clad in sad-coloured clothes and conspicuous for a long rosary of enormous beads which he carried around his neck and which from time to time he handled with ostentatious sanctimony. The other was as complete a contrast to his companion as could be desired by the humorous painter. He was a plump, spry little fellow, brightly dressed and bubbling over with merry, roguish spirits, which formed the most fantastic foil

to the lugubriousness of his fellow-[illegible] good citizen of Paris, arising belated, if any such there may have been, and hurrying to the walls to know how things went for the king's cause, would have recognized readily enough in these two strange opposites two of the most dreaded of the myrmidons of Tristan l'Hermite, no less than his two chief hangmen, Trois-Echelles and Petit-Jean. Trois-Echelles was the long, cadaverous hangman; Petit-Jean was the stout, droll hangman, but when it came to a push and a pinch, both were hangmen and hung in the same manner, if not with the same manners. Petit-Jean pulled a flagon of wine from under the platform of the gallows, lifted it to his lips, drained a mighty draught, sighed with satisfaction, and held out the bottle to his brother craftsman.

"Drink and be merry."

Trois-Echelles, making gestures of protestation with his head but taking the bottle with his hand none the less, drew a deep draught from its throttle and sighed as [illegible]

"[illegible]

Trois-Echelles laughed ill-humoredly.

"Not so lucky if we don't win the battle."

Petit-Jean was complacent.

"Whichever wins will need us to hang the losers. Look at the bright side, man."

Trois-Echelles fumbled his beads furtively.

"I've lost heart, I tell you. I haven't hanged a man for a week."

As he mourned over this melancholy retrospect, the door of a little house hard by the church opened and an old woman, propping herself on a crutch-stick, came hobbling slowly across the open space towards the church. Petit-Jean knew her well enough, for they both lodged in the same house and both on the same floor of attics. He knew she was the mother of the greatest scapegrace in all Paris, a rascal named François Villon, who had disappeared, Heaven alone knew where, to the old lady's great despair. He saluted her good humoredly.

"Good morrow to your nightcap, mother. Have you found your lost sheep?"

Mother Villon shook her head wistfully.

"They say he is banished, but he has sent me money, bless him! though I touch none of it, lest it be badly come by."

Trois-Echelles stopped fumbling his beads and advanced towards her, extending his hand.

"Give it to me to spend on masses," he [illegible] sanctimoniously.

Petit-Jean danced between them.

"Lend it to me for drink money," he urged.

The old woman paid no heed to their proposals. Her tired eyes had caught sight of the grim structure in wood which usurped a place in a familiar scene. She shaded her eyes and peered at it, asking:

"For whom do you build this gallows?"

The glum hangman answered gloomily:

"Oddly enough, we don't know. 'Make me a gallows here,' says the Constable, 'in the open place, and sieges for the king and his courtiers.'"

Mother Villon, her simple curiosity easily satisfied, dropped her informant a curtsey and hobbled slowly up the steps into the church.

Petit-Jean stretched himself again and yawned.

"I'll to sleep and dream of hanging a king."

Trois-Echelles put a lean finger to his lean chin.

"Treason, friend, if Tristan heard you."

Petit-Jean's eyes twinkled.

"Well, let's say an archbishop," he said.

Trois-Echelles nodded approvingly.

"An archbishop ought to make a good end."

His mind pleased itself with the picture of so high a dignitary of the church in his full [illegible]

coming under his tender care and being exhorted by his pious counsels.

The two hangmen climbed on the platform of the grisly erection, and, calmly indifferent to the nature of their bed, were in a few moments fast asleep and snoring as merrily as if every man in the world had been hung and there was nothing else for them to do but to take it easy for the rest of their days.

The hard weariness of work and the easy weariness of wine had made them so heavy-headed that their slumbers were not disturbed by the sound of footfalls, though the footfalls echoed strangely loud in the lonely deserted place—the footfalls of a woman, swift and impatient, the footfalls of a man swiftly pursuing. In another moment the woman and the man came into the open space, now bright and shining with the risen sun. The woman was Katherine de Vaucelles; the man was Noel le Jolys.

As Katherine entered the silent square, she paused for a moment a few paces from the church, and turning, looked at her silent follower.

"Why do you follow me?" she asked, and Noel le Jolys, who had dogged her footsteps from the palace, answered her briskly:

"You should not walk unguarded. Therefore I shadow you."

Katherine scorned him.

"You may well play the shadow, for you cast no shadow of your own. The streets are very idle—the streets are very quiet. I would sooner have my loneliness than your company. Let me pass to my prayers." For Noel had glided between her and the church, and stood barring her passage deferentially.

"For your lover?" he asked, and Katherine flashed at him:

"You have a small mind to ask, yet I have a great mind to answer. My prayers are for a brave gentleman whom I shall never see again."

As she spoke, the cup of her heart seemed to run over with red tears, and the bitter waters trembled in her eyes. Her thoughts wandered over the long white night and her sleepless sorrow, and her vigil by the window, looking out into the rose garden, and her tired eyes straining in vain through the dark for any sight, and her tired ears straining in vain for any sound of the battle in which the lord of her heart was risking his life. For she knew it now; she had learned it through those age-long hours of agony, that he whom she called her enemy was the lord of her heart, that in spite of all her rage at the cheat that had been put upon her, she loved,

not the great noble who had [illegible] save France—no, nor the ragged [illegible] lent her his sword-arm and his sword, [illegible] man, by whatever name he might be called [illegible] whatever way of life his wheel of fortune [illegible] spin, whose hand had proved to be of the right [illegible] to hold her heart in its hollow. The Katherine of yesterday seemed to be dead and buried, to have died a fiery death of fierce thoughts, fierce agonies, fierce exultations, and from that travail a new Katherine had come into being with cleansed eyes to see the world truly and with a cleansed soul to know a great soul's truth.

Noel watched her silence but it meant nothing to him, and he tripped into her high thoughts cheerfully.

"I am a brave gentleman," he said, patting himself approvingly upon the breast. "I slew Thibaut d'Aussigny last night. The king has taken me back into favour. If I played the fool's part yesterday, I can play the wise man's part to-morrow. I was a bubble and a gull and a dunce, if you like, but I meant no harm to the king, and the king smiles on me. Cannot you do the like?"

Katherine came out of her dream and stood upon the earth again, and disdained him.

"No, for you envy a great spirit and your envy makes you a base thing."

Noel protested pettishly:

"He is no man-angel. He is made of Adam's clay like the rest of us."

Katherine's thoughts had wandered away from her escort; her mind's eyes were busy with waving banners, the shock of meeting lances, the glitter of steel coats and the beating of steel upon steel. Through all the melley, her fancy spied one shining figure in bright armour like, so it seemed to her, Archangel Michael or Archangel Gabriel, riding in the pride of the fight with a smile on his lips, sorrow in his heart, and a token of white ribbon between his breast-plate and his breast.

She answered, not Noel's words, but her thoughts:

"My pride has the right to hate him, but I think he is still my soul's man."

Noel was about to speak again, when he suddenly fell back and doffed his bonnet. Perched on the steps of the church stood the stooped sable figure of the king, just coming from his matinal devotions. In the shadow behind him stood his shadows—Poitan and Olivier.

Katherine, her attention swerved by Noel's glance, turned and swayed a reverence to Louis.

he slowly descended the steps. The king surveyed them sardonically.

"Good morning, friends," he said. Then turning to Noel, he ordered, "Take the top of your speed to St. Anthony's gate and bring hot news of the battle."

Noel bowed and sped on his errand. Katherine requested:

"Have I your majesty's leave?"

Tristan and Olivier withdrew themselves discreetly apart, under the shadow of the gallows, that building of all human buildings which was most dear to their hearts and most sacred in their eyes.

Louis came very close to the pale girl and whispered:

"Are you so hungry for your devotions that you cannot waste some worldly words on me? Are you still angry with me for the trick I played on you?"

Katherine's pale face flushed a little as she answered:

"It is wasted spirit to be angry with a king."

Louis grinned.

"You are as pat with your answers as a clerk at matins. Could you give me your heart now if I bent my knee?"

Katherine stifled a great sigh.

"I lost my heart last night; I have not found it again."

Louis flung up his hands in contemptuous amusement.

"The fellow was a fool to blab so glibly. I would have carried the jest farther. But he stood on the punctilio and would not win you without confession."

The girl's heart swelled.

"I am glad he had so much honour," she said, and the shining figure in the bright armour seemed more archangel-like than ever.

Louis looked at her intently, tickling his chin with his forefinger.

"If you wait in the church for his homecoming, you will see how the jest ends," he said.

Katherine made the king a profound reverence and slowly entered the church, every pulse of her body pleading in prayer for her lost lover. She scarcely heeded an old, bowed woman who tottered out, propped on a crutch stick, and who dropped the great lady a respectful curtsey as she passed and went her ways into the silent streets. So the two women in the world whom Villon loved met for the last time.

"There goes a brave lady, gossips, [illegible] chaste lady. She sails in the high latitudes [illegible] and deserves to find the Fortunate Islands [illegible] there not better things to do with Master [illegible] than to hang him?"

Olivier protested:

"This Villon is such a damnable double [illegible] that the ass-headed populace loves him better [illegible] you."

The king's visage soured.

"That is enough to hang him. Yet I have a kind of liking for the fellow, and my dream troubles me —the star that fell from heaven."

Tristan commented bluffly:

"Hang the rascal while you can and thank heaven you are well rid of him."

Even as he spoke the world seemed suddenly to be full of many noises and many voices. From beyond the gate on the ways that led to the city walls came the clamour of hoarse shouts and cries and the thudding din of running feet. From the other side, from the street that led to the Louvre, came the ordered tramp of soldiers.

Olivier interpreting one interruption, said:

"The people are coming from the walls."

And Tristan interpreted the other.

"The queen, sire," he announced.

Through the narrow space that led into the open square there came a line of soldiers escorting a number of splendidly caparisoned litters—the carriages of the queen and the queen's chief ladies. Louis advanced to the first litter, and extending his hand, assisted the queen to descend and conducted her with an elaborate display of polite affection to the gorgeous dais by the side of the church, where they sat side by side on the small thrones that had been prepared for them. The ladies and gentlemen of the court ranged themselves in their places behind the royal pair and the Scottish archers formed a solid force in front. Through the open gateway came a few running, shouting enthusiasts, outstrippers of the mass of citizens who were returning from the walls. Even the heavy sleep of Trois-Echelles and Petit-Jean was not proof against all this tumult. They awoke, rubbed their eyes, then climbing briskly to their feet, leaned over the platform on the handrails of the gallows and surveyed the scene with interest.

Noel le Jolys pushed his way through the crowd about the gateway and advanced to the king

returns in triumph. You [illegible]
now."

Louis nodded.

"It is very well," he affirmed grave[illegible]

Through the gateway the crowd of [illegible] pouring thick and fast, shouting and che[illegible] filling the square in front of the dais with [illegible] of enthusiastic men, women and children, [illegible] ing their arms, flinging flowers and yelling w[illegible] at the topmost pitch of their lungs. The so[illegible] military music and the tramp of marching men [illegible] be heard approaching louder and louder.

Five girls had forced their way to the very f[illegible] row of the throne and were applauding and shou[illegible] with the rest. These were the light ladies of [illegible] Fircone, Isabeau, Jehanneton, Denise, and Blanc[illegible] with Guillemette, fat Robin Turgis' fat daughte[illegible] They were all in a state of great excitement, for their lovers had vanished over night and their Abbess had disappeared like a dream, and they knew not what had become of them. They had little fear for their lovers, for the good gentlemen of the Fellowship of the Cockleshell had a way of diving into the deep waters of existence at intervals in order to escape the too attentive eye and the too particular finger of the law, and the girls had a vague idea of some

[illegible]

[illegible] they were none too sorry to be free from his somewhat decisive authority, and they chattered and babbled like birds escaped from a cage.

By this time the advance guard of the army began to pour in through the narrow mouth of the gateway and to form a line in front of the populace, thus leaving a wide open space between the assembled people and the seated king. From every window heads were thrust and hands extended waving scarfs of silk or scattering flowers. The blare of the soldiers' music grew louder and louder, the tramp of horse and men came nearer and nearer, and then when the cheering was at its shrillest and the rain of flowers thickest, Villon rode in through the gateway on his great warhorse with his five ruffians close at his heels. Villon's lifted hand gave the signal for a halt and he leaped lightly off his horse and advanced towards the king, a glorious figure to the eyes of the crowd in his shining armour with a scarlet cuff upon his helmet. If for a moment his glance rested on the gaunt skeleton of the gallows there came no change in the [illegible]

swathed leg or bandaged forehead of the
he had done in the king's name upon the
emies. But the slings and swathes and
were of no common sort, but splendid bits of
many colours, bearing fantastic devices and
threads of gold and silver.

As Villon and his fantastic escort strode towa
the presence, Noel interposed indignantly.
stretched a pair of protecting arms wide out to wa
off from the king the approach of so singular
deputation, while he demanded angrily:

"In heaven's name, sir, who are these scarecrow
who flaunt their tatters in the presence of the
king?"

The king nursed his chin with an amused smile as
Villon answered:

"The scarecrows are rogues who have fought like
gentlefolk and these rags are the banners of the
enemy."

Even as he spoke the rapscallions stripped the
pieces of silk from arm and leg and forehead, shook
them out into such semblance of their original shape
as battle had left to them and flung them with a
gesture of imperial pride on the ground at the foot
of the dais.

"Well answered," said Louis regally, while two
pursuivants pounced swiftly upon the bits of silk,

and gathering them up with reverential [illegible] them upon the railing in front of the king's chair [illegible] be examined with loving care by the queen.

Standing erect, Villon addressed the king:

"Louis of France, we bring you these silks for your carpet. An hour ago they wooed the wind from Burgundian staves and floated over Burgundian helmets. I will make no vain glory of their winning. Burgundy fought well, but France fought better, and these trophies trail in our triumph. To a mercer's eyes these bits of tissue are but so many squares of damaged web. To a soldier's eye, they cover crowded graves with honour. To a king's eye, they deck one throne with lonely splendour. When we here, who breathe hard from fighting, and we who stand there and marvel, are dust, when the king's name is but a golden space in chronicles grey with age, these banners shall hang from Cathedral arches and your children's children's children, [illegible] in reverent arms, shall peep through the dust [illegible] the faded colours, and baby lips shall [illegible] echo of our battle."

CHAPTER XV

THE SHADOW OF THE GALLOWS

As Villon ended a great peal of music came from the church, the magnificent music of a Te Deum Laudamus; while from the soldiers who choked the archway, a glowing sea of steel, there rose one common cry of "God save the Grand Constable!"

Olivier leaned over and whispered to the king:

"They cheer him, sire."

Louis waved him impatiently aside, and leaning over the railing, spoke:

"My Lord Constable, and you, brave soldiers, the King of France thanks you for your gift. Victory was indeed assured you by the justice of our cause. My Lord of Montcorbier, you may promise these brave fellows that their sovereign will remember them."

Swiftly Villon turned and addressed the motley throng behind him:

"In the king's name, a gold coin to every man who fought and a cup of wine to every man, woman and child who wishes to drink the king's health."

The king smiled wryly.

"Ever generous," he said.

reverential [illegible]

the king's chair [illegible]

salutation, which Louis [illegible] silks [illegible]

question. [illegible] what

"What have you now to do?" [illegible] Burgun-

Villon saluted the king again.

"My latest duty, sire," he answered, and

again he turned to address the multitude:

"Soldiers who have served under me, friends many

have fought with me, and you, people, whom I [illegible] they

striven to succour, listen to my amazing [illegible] eyes

You know me a little as Count of Montcorbier, [illegible] Where

Constable of France. I know myself [illegible] and [illegible]

well as François Villon, Master of Arts, [illegible] when [illegible]

ballads and somewhile bibber and [illegible] [illegible]

now my task as Grand Constable of France [illegible]

clare that the life of Master François [illegible]

felt and to pronounce on him this sentence [illegible]

be straightway hanged upon yonder gibbet [illegible]

His words fell like the beat of a passing [illegible]

the ears of an absolutely silent crowd and [illegible]

few year-long seconds the silence brooded [illegible]

place. The five wantons on the fringe of the [illegible]

caught at each others' fingers and gazed [illegible]

splendid gentleman their [illegible]

As for the five [illegible]

From the church suddenly the [illegible] the Te Deum ceased to swell and in its [illegible] forth upon the silent air the awful notes [illegible] Miserere. The king had been at the ear of the [illegible]ist that morning and had planned his effects [illegible] The melancholy music stirred the people to murmurs of surprise and protest.

Guy Tabarie, flourishing his notched and bloody sword, thrust his round body forward.

"What jest is this?" he asked.

And Villon answered him:

"Such a jest as I would rather weep over to-morrow than laugh at to-day. For the pitcher breaks at the well's mouth this very morning. Messire Noel, to you I surrender my sword. I like to believe that it has scraped a little shame from its master's coat."

He drew his great war-sword and handed it to Noel le Jolys, who, for one of the few times in his life, astonished into forgetfulness of courtly etiquette, had been staring, open-mouthed, at the astonishing revelation that had just been made to him. The gleam of the war-worn weapon recalled him to himself and he took it from the hands of the doomed man with a grave courtesy which meant something more than the official fulfillment of a formal duty. Noel le Jolys was a soldier and his eyes paid homage to a brave man.

Villon turned to Tristan.

"Master Tristan, perform your office upon this self-doomed felon."

With great alacrity, Tristan moved towards Villon, but his motion was met by such angry murmurs from the crowd, and not from the crowd alone, but from the soldiers who had followed Villon to victory, that even he shrank back instinctively before its menace. There came cries from a thousand throats calling on the king to pardon the Grand Constable, calling upon those who loved him to rescue him.

"King, is this justice?" René de Montigny shouted, and his question evoked a roar of approval from the multitude.

The king's keen glance surveyed the scene with no sign of fear and no sign of annoyance. Leaning easily upon the railing, as a man might lean who surveyed an amusing farce or interlude, he addressed the crowd:

"Good people of Paris, you have heard your Grand Constable pronounce sentence upon a criminal. Has Master François Villon any reason to urge, any plea to offer, why the sentence should not be carried out?"

Villon waved his hand disdainfully.

"I have nothing whatever to say."

Villon must die. It's bad luck for him, but he has worse luck and so—to business."

As he spoke he drew near to the line of Scottish archers and two of their number laid hands on him, one at either side. The sight of their hero thus in the very clutch of justice spurred the multitude to renewed exasperation. Angry demands for justice, for mercy, for rescue, shook the summer air. Unarmed citizens broke into an armourer's shop hard by, and, seizing whatever weapons they could lay their hands upon, flourished them aloft in significant assertion that their words were but the prefaces to deeds. Again Tabarie's bull voice bellowed to those about him:

"Kings must listen to the voice of the people. Shall the man who led us to victory die a rogue's death?"

And again his thunder heralded a storm. Soldiers and citizens alike seemed prepared to rescue Villon by force from the hands of his enemies. The Scottish archers with levelled arquebusses formed a line in front of the dais and every courtier drew his sword. Only the king seemed unmoved, only the king seemed entertained by the wind he had sowed, the whirlwind he had reaped. He asked quite quietly:

Burgh

No, sire. Master François [illegible] they
Master François Villon says."

As he spoke the angry people, swaying like [illegible]
shouted new shouts of rescue, clamoured [illegible]
for pardon. Olivier, green-pale, whispered [illegible]
to the king:

"Sire, the rogues are in a damnable temper. [illegible]
you not gain time, postpone, promise?"

Louis answered imperturbably:

"Are the fools so fond of the fellow? [illegible]
way to stop their shouting."

As he spoke, for the first time he rose from his [illegible]
a frail, small, black figure, to dominate the [illegible]
waves of humanity, while Olivier, holding [illegible]
hand to order silence, shouted:

"Peace, peace! The King would speak. [illegible]
[illegible]

hear what the king said.

"Good people of Paris, I am no tyrant. But a king is the father of his people, and his ears can never be shut against the cries of his children. You ask for this man? Hear, then, my judgment! This man's life is forfeit. Which of you will redeem it?

If there be one among you ready to take Master François Villon's place on yonder gibbet, let that one speak now."

There was a brief silence as the mob began to realise the meaning of the king's words, a silence broken by angry cries.

"What does he mean? Take his place on the gallows! A trick—a trick!"

Louis grinned complacently.

"No trick, friends, but a simple bargain. Here is a man condemned to death; here is an idle gibbet. If ye prize him so highly, let one among you die for him. It has been said by the wise Apostle: 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.' On my word as a king, when such a splendid volunteer is swinging at the end of yonder rope that moment Master François Villon shall go free. Come, who will slip neck in noose for the sake of a hero?"

Villon protested haughtily:

"No man shall die for me."

But, indeed, his protest was premature. The anger of the crowd dwindled into sullen clamours.

"The king laughs at us! 'Tis too much to ask."

A faint, exultant smile flickered over the king's face as he asked:

[illegible] friends, where is your [illegible] Who will be his lieutenant, who will be heir to the heritage of a cross bar and a rope? You are not so brisk as you were. Does your devotion falter? Were you mocking me and him?"

Villon looked at the king with a kind of disdainful admiration.

"King of foxes!" he applauded, and the king heard him and smiled again.

"Tristan," he said, "go into yonder church and bring me an inch of candle."

Tristan bowed and entered the church. The king went on:

"Our royal mercy is mild, our royal mercy is patient. As it is our hope and our belief to live in history as a good and gracious sovereign, we would not have it said of us that we denied even a [illegible] due and reasonable opportunity."

Even while he spoke, [illegible]

[illegible]

me pointed

and wind-

Louis stopped and whispered to a page behind him who bowed and entered the church. Then the king spoke again to the silent, wondering crowd:

"So long as this candle burns, so long François Villon lives. If while it burns, one of you is moved to take Master Villon's place on the gallows, so much the better for Master Villon, and so much the worse for his substitute. Herald, proclaim our pleasure."

At a sign from Montjoye, the royal herald, two pursuivants stirred the air with the blast of golden trumpets. Then Montjoye spoke:

"The king's grace and the king's justice is ready to grant life and liberty to François Villon if anyone be found willing to take his place on the gallows and die his death that he may live his life!"

As Montjoye's words died away a great silence fell upon the assembled people, a silence so still and cruel that men's hearts grew cold and the warm June air seemed to be sighing over fields of ice. The king leaned over and addressed his prisoner confidentially:

"Master Villon, Master Villon, you see what human friendship means and the sweet voices of the multitude."

Villon answered boldly:

"Sire, it is no news to me that men love the dear habit of living."

[illegible] signified to Montjoye.

"Proclaim again," he said; and once more the [illegible] of pursuivants blew their trumpets and once [illegible] Montjoye made his singular proposition of pardon to the assemblage.

CHAPTER XVI

"WE SPEAK TO MEN"

IT fell this time upon fresh ears, the ears of an old woman who was patiently pushing her way through the crowd in her effort to reach her humble lodging. She had succeeded in making her way to the open space as the last words of the herald's offer were being spoken, and suddenly her dulled brain caught the full significance of Montjoye's speech. Looking wildly around her, she saw where Villon stood, an armoured figure held captive, and without attempting to realize the meaning of what she beheld, she dropped her stick and tottered forward to the dais, where she fell on her knees with clasped, entreating hands.

"Sire, sire, I will die for him!"

Villon's heart leaped to his throat when he saw her.

"Mammy, mammy, go away!" he cried, and he made a vain attempt to move towards his mother, a movement instantly restrained by the crossed weapons of his captors. At the same moment Katherine de Vaucelles came out of the church door in obedience to the summons of a royal page, who

[illegible] her prayers, and [illegible] the king desired her presence. She paused at the head of the steps in amazed survey of the crowded place and a scene that at first she could not understand.

"Who is this woman?" Louis asked, looking down at the poor old dame, who knelt before him and besought him. Olivier answered in his ear:

"The fellow's mother, sire."

A very little tenderness came into Louis' eyes, a very little tenderness trembled on his lips.

"Woman, we cannot hear you," he said. "By God's law you have given him life once and by my law you may not give him life again."

"Sire, I beseech you," Mother Villon entreated, but the king's pity was not to be purchased at [illegible]

"Take her away and use her gently," he said. [illegible] Jehan stepped to obey the king's [illegible] but the old woman [illegible]

[illegible] the cold, calm voice [illegible] the grim terms of the king's [illegible]

The silence that followed was [illegible] the sweet, clear voice of a girl.

"I will," said Katherine de Vaucelles [illegible] stand on the church steps, and on the instant [illegible] were turned to the spot where the maiden [illegible] with face as white as pear-blossom and her [illegible] tightly clenched by her sides. She moved [illegible] down the steps in the dead silence and paused [illegible] the king's throne.

"I will die for him, sire," she said quietly.

From Villon's lips there came a mighty cry [illegible] "Katherine!" and a fain spot of colour rose on [illegible] king's cheeks.

"Mistress, we speak to men," he said.

Tristan pressed his great hands together.

"By St. Denis, our women seem to make the [illegible] men," he grunted.

Katherine stood, tall and proud, facing the [illegible] Mother Villon, stirred by this heavenly interfer[illegible] left her son to fall at the feet of the angel la[illegible] kiss the hem of her garment.

Katherine spoke bravely:

"Sire, I love this man and would be proud [illegible] for him. It may chime with your pleasure [illegible]

Your word is given [illegible]

The king made an impatient gesture.

"We speak to men."

Villon caught at his words.

"I speak to a woman," he cried, and gazing passionately at his love, he called to her: "Katherine, my Katherine, death is a little thing. For love is deathless and you give me a better thing than life."

With unmoved voice, with unchanged face, Katherine persisted:

"Sire, I claim your promise."

Louis again denied her.

"We speak to men. Tristan, do your office."

At this moment the situation suddenly changed. Villon unexpectedly wrenched himself free from the control of the two soldiers beside him, whose [illegible] had relaxed in their wonder at what was [illegible] and sprang towards Katherine. [illegible] inspired the [illegible]

[illegible] to the socket! People of [illegible] speak to my lover before I die?"

The place was a raving bedlam of noise and [illegible] ace. The Scottish archers did not dare to make [illegible] attempt to recapture their escaped prisoner, but kept their line in front of the royal dais, while Villon stood by the side of Katherine with drawn sword, an archangel of insurrection, ready at any moment to fling the forces behind him upon his adversaries. Yet the king remained as unmoved as if he had been witnessing a puppet show. In his thin, even voice, he commanded:

"Speak to her while the candle burns, not a second longer."

With one accord, Villon's adherents drew back and Villon was left with Katherine alone in the open space.

Katherine whispered to him:

"François, will you not take life at my hands?"

Villon answered her tenderly:

"Dear child, if that crowned Judas there had taken you at your word, do you think I would have outlived you by the space of a second?"

She looked fixedly into his eyes.

"You are resolved?"

He smiled back at her.

"I am as [illegible] as [illegible] save me."

She looked over her shoulder with a shudder.

"Dearest, the candle flickers in the wind. There is a dagger in your girdle. Slay me and yourself."

"You mean it?" he gasped, and she answered firmly:

"By God's Mother and God's Son."

A sudden, wonderful thought flashed through Villon's mind. He had won love, he could not hope to win life, but at least he might so manage as to die a soldier's death and not a knave's. He whispered to her eagerly:

"Then we will spoil old Louis' pleasure yet. Lady, will you marry me here at the foot of the gallows?"

She answered him:

"With all my heart."

Instantly he turned and left her and [illegible] towards the throne.

"King, I crave your patience, but [illegible] must tarry and turn [illegible]

Louis smiled [illegible]

"It is [illegible]

University of Paris and as such have the [illegible] extremis to any sacrament of the church. I [illegible] lived a confirmed bachelor, but now I have a mind to change my state. Find me a priest, King Louis."

Olivier stooped to the king.

"He speaks the truth, sire. He can claim this right."

Louis leaned forward interested.

"What do you hope to gain by this?"

Villon answered calmly:

"The right to die like a soldier by the sword, not like a rogue by the rope."

A murmur of approval stirred the silent crowd, but it died away as Katherine suddenly advanced and stood, a white figure like a fair lily, between the king and Villon.

"Nay, you gain more than this. I am the Lady Katherine de Vaucelles, kinswoman of the royal house, mistress of a hundred lands, Grand Seneschale of Gascony, Warden of the Marches of Poitou. In my own domains I exercise the High Justice and the Low. This man is of humble birth, and when I marry him he becomes my vassal. Over my vassals I hold the law of life and death."

Villon dropped on his knees beside his lady.

Louis clapped his thin hands together as a man might applaud a play.

"You are a bold minion and you have [illegible]. But if you marry this gaol bird you [illegible] condition. Your high titles fall from you, your great estates are forfeit to the crown and you [illegible] he must go out into exile together; the lady woman with the beggar man."

Katherine turned to Villon where he knelt beside her.

"'Tis a little price to pay for my lover."

Villon looking up into her eyes, questioned her.

"Do you think I'm worth it, Kate? 'Tis a [illegible] price to pay for this poor anatomy."

She repeated her words.

"'Tis a little price to pay for my lover. [illegible] doubt me?"

Unheeded a man-at-arms pushed his way through the crowd to the king's dais and whispered [illegible] words in the ear of Noel le Jolys, who in turn whispered in the ear of Olivier and Olivier became paler than before. Villon caught Katherine by the hand.

"No, Kate, no! The world is wide, our heaven light. For a star has fallen to me from heaven; it fills the earth with glory."

His words fell on the king's ears like the [illegible] oracle. Standing in his place [illegible]

and trembling fingers, he repeated faltering the mystic words.

"A star has fallen from heaven. My dream, my dream!"

Olivier plucked at his mantle, whispering with twitching lips:

"My liege, this story spreads like the plague in the city and every alley vomits mutiny."

Louis pushed him aside.

"Rub your pale cheeks," he said; "for all is well. Destiny has spoken."

Then leaning over and stretching his thin hand towards the crowd, he cried:

"People of Paris, that man shall have his life; this woman her lover. I have tried a man's heart and found it pure gold; a woman's soul and found it all angel. True man and true woman, to each other's arms!"

And Katherine and Villon obeyed the king.

EPILOGUE

AT about this point in his narrative, Dom Gregory, as those happy few who are familiar with his manuscript in the Abbey of Bonne Aventure are aware, diverges from the full current of his story to indulge in some philosophical reflections upon the character of Louis XI.

What, Dom Gregory asks in cautious interrogation, were the real intentions of the monarch with regard to François Villon and the Lady Katherine de Vaucelles? His enemies no doubt assert that he played with their destinies for a purely malignant purpose and was only prevented from carrying his evil intentions into effect by the storm of popular indignation that threatened him. Others, again, who pretend to a more intimate acquaintance with the shifty character of the king, insist that he had indeed purpose to send Master Villon to the gallows or at least and worse, into a beggar's exile, but that he was saved by Master Villon's happy use of

regard Dom Gregory records with a sly [illegible] how many suggest that Master François used [illegible] words of set purpose with the very intention of playing upon the strained strings of the king's mind. But there be those, too, Dom Gregory adds, and we gather from his manner that he is inclined to include himself in their number, there be those partisans of the king who maintain that the king's cruelty was from the start a mere mask for clemency, that he only intended a little malicious sport with the too outspoken lover and the too disdainful lass, and that it had never been in the scope of his thoughts seriously to punish either the broker of ballads or the valiant maid of Vaucelles.

Starting from this point, Dom Gregory indulges in a great many reflections upon kings and kingship and the consequences of kingly acts, all of which seemed perhaps more momentous at the time when they were written and in the sleepy Abbey where they lie enshrined, than in busier and more bustling times. One could have wished that Dom Gregory had let such philosophies go by the board and had given us instead some greater knowledge of what happened to François Villon and Katherine de Vaucelles after they fell upon each other's necks in that open place in Paris, with the mob huzzahing,

[illegible] king staring and [illegible]
[illegible]ally dismantling the useless globe. [illegible]
Dom Gregory is little less than dumb. Lo[illegible]
manuscript account for much of his silence; [illegible]
his ecclesiastical indifference to the wedded state
may account for more. If we can gather vaguely
from other sources that the poet and his mistress
settled down on a small and quiet estate in Poitou,
lived a peaceful country life for many years and died
a peaceful country death at the end, it is the most
we can hope to gain with surety. We are glad to
believe in their happiness, for he was a true lover
and she was a fair woman.

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[illegible]

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